

Sivananda's Integral Yoga

by Swami Venkatesananda



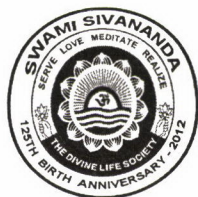
**SIVANANDA'S
INTEGRAL YOGA**

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By

Siva-Pada-Renu

Sri Swami Venkatesananda



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ESSENCE OF SIVANANDA'S TEACHINGS

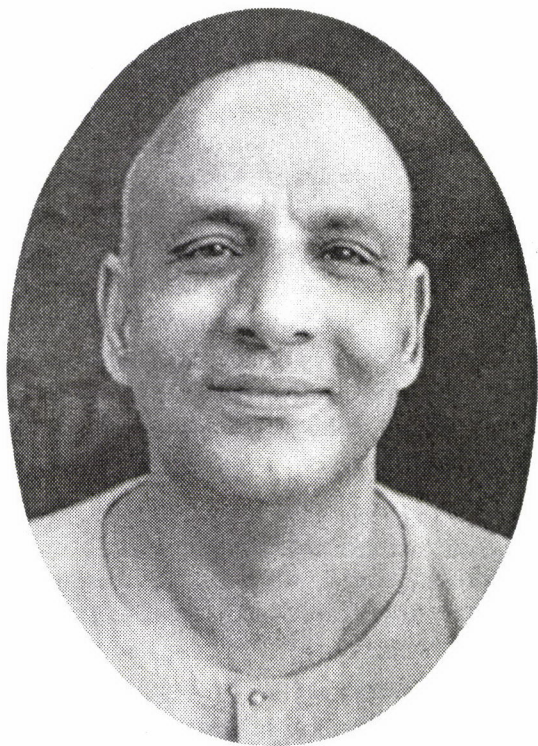
“Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise;
Be good, Do good, Be kind, Be compassionate;
Enquire ‘Who am I?’ Know the Self, and be free.

This is my message. Everything is contained in this. Serve all. Serve the sick and the poor. Serve with love. Feel that you are serving the Lord in all. Develop cosmic love. Expand your heart. Give, give. Give in plenty to all. Share what you have with others. Eradicate selfishness and greed. Annihilate egoism and pride. Purify your heart. Transform your nature. Eradicate all the evil qualities that lurk in your mind. Cultivate divine virtues. Lust, anger, greed, pride, egoism, all this must be removed. Truthfulness, love, purity, humility, nobility, magnanimity, all these must be developed. Meditate in Brahmanuhurta. Do Japa and Kirtan.

“Be good, do good. This formula alone will do for Self-realisation. All the teachings of all prophets are contained in these four words. Be kind to all. Speak soft, loving, sweet words of consolation. Never utter harsh, angry, vulgar words. Be compassionate. Compassion is a divine virtue. Cultivate it by active Seva.

“Enquire ‘Who am I?’ Know that there is one

Atma, immortal, unborn, all-blissful, peaceful - Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Your goal is to realise this. Forget not the goal. Attain this through service, Japa, Kirtan, prayer, meditation, right conduct and the Grace of God and Guru. May God bless you all”.





I LIVE FOR YOU

I maintain my body in order to serve my
God, humanity.

—Swami Sivananda

MY DEVOTEE

He worships me best who faithfully
follows my teachings best.

—Swami Sivananda



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ॐ नमः शिवाय

**SIVANANDA'S
INTEGRAL YOGA**

श्री सद्गुरु परमात्मने नमः





INTRODUCTION

Cornerstones of Sivananda's Yoga

Exuberant vivacity, a spirit of total dedication to the chosen cause, an unlimited capacity to love, to forbear and forgive, an irrepressible urge to serve all without the least regard to his own limitation and the merit of the person served and to give, give and give all to all, without reservation. These were born with Sri Swami Sivananda. These were the cornerstones of his activities, whatever was the walk of life he had chosen to tread. As a boy, he became the beloved of his teachers and the leader of his companions, because of these qualities. These qualities earned for him great renown and the love of the masses when he was a doctor, both in India and in Malaya. These very qualities with a slight but far-reaching sublimation distinguished him later as Mahatma.

Thus were born the three Mahavakyas - SERVE, LOVE, GIVE - that were the foundation of Divine Life, over which Gurudev erected the divine mansion of Self-realisation with the fourth - MEDITATE.

It is a significant fact that Gurudev never had a Guru as we understand this word, to lead him by the hand, to correct any mistakes he might

make and to further his achievements. The Swami who initiated him into Sannyasa considered himself blessed to have such a disciple and did not instruct the enlightened. It is equally significant that Gurudev never set any great store by text-book Yoga or intellectual Vedanta. To him Yoga and Vedanta meant life to be lived, not words to be crammed nor ideas to be understood.

Therefore, while it is true that he read a lot and wrote more, Gurudev was always a dynamic sage, a life-scientist, whose laboratory was his own life and his discoveries the life divine. All his exacting researches he conducted with the help of the powerful instruments he had been endowed with at birth, the divine gifts of a loving compassionate heart, a giving hand and an active nature. How and when the fourth element of meditation entered this group was hard to guess, even for Gurudev. He was emphatic, however, that anyone who continuously practised these virtues of selfless service, cosmic love and spontaneous charity, would find himself in contemplation, and that only such a one could truly meditate, though others too should daily attempt meditation. The fruit of contemplation is Self-realisation.

SERVE, LOVE, MEDITATE and REALISE are therefore the cornerstones of the edifice of Gurudev's life and Sadhana; 'giving' is a part, though a very significant part, of the combination of love and service. These together form the great

discovery of Gurudev, the fruit of his Integral Yoga and the seed of the Divine Life Society that has adopted these Four Great Words as its mottos.

No doubt, these Four represent the Four Great Paths to Self-realisation, respectively. SERVE brings to the mind the essence of Karma Yoga. LOVE reminds you of your duty to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your soul, or to practise Parabhakti. MEDITATE asks you to apply yourself to Raja Yoga or the Ashtanga Yoga of Patanjali; and REALISE awakens you to Jnana Yoga, to the pristine glory of the Immortal Self that you are, the fountain of bliss, the ocean of joy and the perennial source of peace and power.

These Four Words represent the all-important cornerstones of Gurudev's Integral Yoga on which stand the worldwide Divine Life Mission with the resplendent Gurudev at the top. In our admiration of the Mission and unique Yoga of Synthesis which Gurudev has presented to humanity, we are apt to forget that this Yoga is the outcome of Gurudev's own life. But Gurudev was eager that we should all profit by his labours, and by diligently practising this Yoga of Synthesis become full-blown Yogins, even as he was.

Gurudev's Goal

Eager to know what Sadhana Gurudev had done and what realisation he had, we prayed to

him for enlightenment. His answers were truly eye-openers to us Sadhakas. As we listened to him, we realised that we were standing before a 'Breathing Upanishad' and were speechless.

"No amount of talking, discussing and questioning will do. You must sincerely and whole-heartedly apply yourselves to practice. Do not think that you can attain Self-realisation by magic. You have to work hard. God is the all-pervading consciousness. Our goal is to realise His immediate presence. You are not able to see Him because your heart is as hard as granite. It has to melt like butter if you are to realise God. The Truth is veiled by Rajas and Tamas. You should eradicate Tamas, transform Rajas and cultivate Sattva. Then you will become godly and realise God.

"God is One. Do you feel this? Do you feel that you are one with all? How much jealousy, hatred, ill-will, distrust and attachment is in your heart? You will have to eradicate them if you sincerely wish to realise this Oneness."

These words came as darts from him and pierced the veil within us. With a sudden start we realised that we were standing before the greatest living Advaitin, the sage who constantly manifested this oneness and unity in his daily and hourly life, who led a godly life upon this earth, a life whose fragrance was Sattva or divinity.

How he achieved this supreme state is revealed in the following pages.

Chapter One

HATHA YOGA SADHANA

1. *Regular practice of Asanas gave Gurudev youthful vigour.*
2. *Pranayama was the secret of his phenomenal energy and mental powers of comprehension and retention.*

Yoga Asanas

Whatever be the state of his health, Gurudev did not neglect his Yoga Asanas practice even for a day. He often warned aspirants against the wrong application of the Vedantic formula "I am not this body" to cover up their lethargy in this very important respect and neglect their health.

With the aid of some books Gurudev started practising Sirshasana and a few other important Yoga Asanas in Malaya. His enthusiasm was so infectious that his cook, Sri Narasimha Iyer also began practising Asanas. The blessed soul joined his master years later again, became his Sannyasa disciple as Swami Shraddhananda and attained final release at Gurudev's feet in 1952. Gurudev was a very good gymnast in his youth and his gymnastic instructor Sri Sambasiva Iyer remembered how well Gurudev used to do

unaided the most difficult exercises on the parallel bar. In fact, his proficiency earned him such a place in the teacher's heart that Sri Sambasiva Iyer would confidently ask him to take the class in his absence. Gurudev initiated him in October 1955 into the holy order of Sannyasa, naming him Swami Sadasivananda.

Gurudev emphasised that good physical health, far from being a hindrance to spiritual practice, is a necessary prerequisite to it. It is never too late to start. He himself began practising Yoga Asanas when he was nearly thirty. There is no condition in which it should be given up. Even in disease one should daily practise some Asanas, modified to suit the condition of the body.

If the full Sirshana is not possible, the 'rabbit' pose, which is kneeling on the ground and touching the ground with the crown of the head, making a good arch with the trunk, will do. If even this is considered not advisable, you can allow the head to hang out of the bed for a brief while. But Gurudev would never allow a morning to pass without the practice of these Asanas.

Physical Exercises

Similarly, some mild physical exercises formed part of Gurudev's daily routine. "Sitting on your bed, just after you wake up, you can finish these exercises in five minutes," said Gurudev.

Sitting cross-legged he bent forward, then

leaned backward supporting the trunk with the palms planted on the bed, then he returned to the sitting posture and twisted the trunk to the right and then to the left.

Sitting with feet stretched in front, he flexed the legs at the knees and caught hold of the toes; he then rolled and swung backward thus making a seesaw with the back.

Getting out of bed, Gurudev would stand and lean forward against a wall and do some mild trunk twisting exercises. Anyone can do that. They are easily done, and the benefits are incalculable.

Pranayama

Gurudev was a great believer and exponent of Pranayama. It is an astonishing fact that he devoted several hours of his extremely busy day to the practice of Pranayama.

Invariably he got up before 4.00 a.m., which was well before the time he asked all aspirants to get up, but which few followed. He woke up not later than 3 a.m. After this over an hour was spent in Pranayama alone. He did Pranayama while mentally repeating the Pranava—OM. Normally he practised the Sukha-Purvak-Pranayama, though he did a few rounds of Bhastrika in winter and a few rounds of Sitali in summer. Before breakfast, once again he practised Pranayama for about half an hour. After returning from the office at noon he

practised Pranayama for another half an hour. Evening found him at it again, and the final round was done before going to bed at night. Thus, Gurudev devoted about four of the busiest hours of his eventful day to this important practice.

Here a point is well worth noting. Gurudev's ideal is Integral Yoga. Exercise of the body has its place in it, so has control of breath. The degree of importance however varies. Pranayama floods the system with peace and bliss. Therefore, it was given a greater portion of Gurudev's time than the time allotted to Yoga Asanas and physical culture, though they were not neglected. Gurudev's is the commonsense Yoga.

Benefits

As a result of the regular and diligent practice of Yoga Asanas and Pranayama, Gurudev worked like a man of 28 when he was actually 69. This would assume the proportion of a miracle if we bear in mind that even before embracing the Holy Order of Sannyasa, Gurudev had untiringly given of his energy to the people in Malaya and India, whom he served as a doctor. Not a moment was he idle after leaving the College. Running the Medical Journal 'Ambrosia' was no easy task for the young doctor. Gurudev had always been enthusiasm itself. To him the moment mattered more than the years to come. In the work of the moment he gave his heart and his soul without reserve.

This is common knowledge today. During Gurudev's All India Tour in 1950, he had to address over five or six public meetings a day. At each of those public meetings Gurudev spoke, sang and danced as though it was the only one in his life. He could give his very life to those he addressed. There were small private gatherings too and mere informal visits to some institutions, but there he would speak and sing with the same zeal and fervour that he displayed while addressing mammoth meetings. Even if the audience consisted of four members of a family, to Gurudev it was an opportunity to spread the gospel of Divine Life, the glory of the Divine Name and the gist of spiritual teachings. To him it was as great an opportunity as that of addressing five millions.

This was Gurudev's inborn nature. While in Malaya he would take upon his shoulders the work of a number of his colleagues, and in his zeal for service he would expend every ounce of his energy. Anyone else would have grown old at 38, but he then renounced the world and started a new life!

The life that awaited him at Rishikesh was in no way made to restore the energy spent in Malaya. The fare of an anchorite, starvation or food that he was not accustomed to and conditions of life that would have drained what

energy was left in him, could only have been expected to hasten old age.

But it was not so. In 1930, after seven years of rigorous austerities, when Gurudev addressed his first audiences in U.P. and Bihar, they found in him a youthful Yogi, full of ebullient vigour, his powerful voice ringing with a soul-force that had conquered age and put weakness to shame. This sudden bursting of the inner fountain of energy Gurudev ascribed to Pranayama, meditation and Japa, but particularly to Pranayama.

What power Gurudev's words had! They came from his heart, from his soul. Those who have heard Sri Rama Tirtha's lectures, tell that after each lecture Rama Tirtha would return almost a dead man. So very exhausted he used to be, for he gave of his very life in every word he uttered. Similar was the case with Gurudev even during the earliest propaganda tours. His word had power. During one of the tours in 1930, he addressed the students of a High School at Sitapur. When he returned to Rishikesh, he received a letter from the parent of a boy in that school that he had run away after hearing Gurudev's lecture, leaving a note behind: "I am going to meet my real Father, Swami Sivananda". Such was the awakening and transforming power of Gurudev's words. Similarly, Dr. Roy who heard Gurudev's lecture at Chidambaram joined the

Ashram as its Medical Officer soon after the All-India tour in 1950.

The regular practice of Hatha Yoga endowed Gurudev with a phenomenal memory and a marvellous capacity to do Ashtavadhana (doing eight things at a time). Pranayama purifies the Nadis and strengthens the mind. Mental powers are augmented. Gurudev had a powerful brain. He could give directions for work to a hundred people at the same time. Every visitor to Ananda Kutir knew that he was 'registered' in Gurudev's mind and that he would be recognised by Gurudev even if he met him after a decade.

During Gurudev's All-India Tour, he met the then Chief Minister of Mysore, Sri K. C. Reddy, at the Bangalore airport and conversed with him for a few minutes. Two years later Sri Reddy, then a Minister in the Government of India, was proceeding by car from Delhi to Rishikesh. He told his companion: "I do not think Gurudev will recognise me. I met him only for a few minutes and during the Tour he must have seen thousands of people. Moreover, I was in a different dress then." But the companion assured Sri Reddy that Gurudev had a keen memory. As soon as the two visitors were approaching him, Gurudev greeted: "Welcome Sri Reddy Maharaj!"

Instances are galore when Gurudev performed more astounding feats of memory by recalling even the words that a visitor spoke ten

years earlier. Sadhu Murugadas visited the Ashram in 1940 and sang Bhajans. He visited the Ashram again in 1948 and sang Bhajans. When he was about to conclude, Gurudev reminded him: "Your usual beautiful concluding song 'Asato ma sat gamaya!'" Murugadasji was surprised that Gurudev remembered the particular song, with which he concluded his programme eight years before.

This phenomenal memory Gurudev ascribed to Pranayama, meditation and Japa, Pranayama particularly.

An agile body, wonderful vitality, a powerful voice, astounding memory and perennial youth are the fruits that Gurudev had reaped from his Hatha Yoga practice.



Chapter Two
KARMA YOGA

1. *Indiscriminate charity was Gurudev's nature.*
2. *In rendering selfless service, Gurudev made no distinction of caste, creed, nationality or sex.*
3. *He had no distinction between dignified service and menial labour.*
4. *He rendered the service even at the risk of his life.*
5. *Compassion, tolerance and a resolute determination not to see evil are the hallmarks of his service.*
6. *Gurudev had not the slightest pride of Sannyasa or Seva.*
7. *He respected the views of all, but was not afraid of public criticism.*
8. *Service of the sick, of the destitute and of aspirants were the fields of his special service.*
9. *He was the moulder of saints.*
10. *The Narayana-Bhava was all-important for him in service.*
11. *So he won the hearts of all.*

The Elements of Service

The body is a perishable by-product of Karma (past births' action). It is a valuable instrument for spiritual practice, but only an instrument. It is to be looked after, but that is not the goal of life.

The mind should be strengthened by Pranayama in order that it may be strong to conquer itself and to annihilate the evil tendencies latent in it; but strengthening the mind is itself not the goal.

Gurudev therefore, utilised Hatha Yoga Sadhana as the necessary means to enable him to serve. One who watched him closely would even say that service was Gurudev's goal. And it is understandable, for the type of service that Gurudev rendered to humanity only the Jivanmukta could render, bringing about the moral and spiritual upliftment of the world. To his illumined soul therefore, body and mind were the slaves that existed to serve his own manifestations in the countless beings in the universe.

To the seeker, however, service is prescribed as a preliminary purificatory practice before he enters into the inner court of contemplation. During his life in Malaya and in Swarg Ashram, Gurudev demonstrated the elements of his service for the guidance of spiritual aspirants.

Charity: Indiscriminate charity was the rule

with Gurudev. It was his unchangeable nature. Sri Ganapati Sastrigal, a close relative of Gurudev, said that whatever was given to him, Gurudev would distribute to his companions, even when he was a small boy. Free distribution of literature started with the birth of the Medical Journal 'Ambrosia' which he conducted at Trichinapoly. Giving away food, money, clothing and medicines manifested itself in Malaya. Unrestrained and indiscriminate was his charity in Malaya. Those who attended the Sraddhas in his house, told that the priests got ten dollars as offering in addition to rich presents in the form of clothes, silver vessels, etc., while they would get only two dollars in others houses. A monk who once visited Gurudev's house at Johore-Bahru was warmly welcomed and treated like a prince. When he left the place, Gurudev gave him a hearty send-off and got him a first class ticket on the train to his destination.

Gurudev's cook in Malaya had completed his first month of service with Gurudev. The salary that was agreed upon before appointment was 25 dollars. On the morning of the first of the following month, Gurudev ran into the kitchen and handed over to Sri Narasimha Iyer 35 dollars. Iyer could not make this out and looked questioningly at Gurudev. "That is your Sambhavana, Dikshitar!" clarified Gurudev and asked "Is it enough?" This word 'Sambhavana' has a holy connotation and means an offering made with devotion and

reverence. Narasimha Iyer told us that he had never heard Gurudev refer to his servants' dues as 'salary' or 'pay' or 'wages'. Even in those days Gurudev looked upon his servants as his equals, nay his God. Whatever he gave them was given as an offering unto God.

No Distinctions: Gurudev's service was the sun before which all the mist of distinctions of caste, creed, colour and sex vanished. It is needless to say that as a doctor in Malaya he had served people of all castes, nationalities, etc. As a mendicant in Swarg Ashram to whom service, especially of the sick, was the first concern, he never enquired of the people whom he served to which caste, creed or country they belonged. The doors of the Sivananda Ashram are ever open to people of all castes, creeds and nationalities. Orthodox South Indian Brahmins like Sri Ganapati Sastrigal, non-Brahmins of whom there are quite a number in the Ashram's roll of inmates, Christians like Sri Sundaram from Madras and any number of Europeans and Americans, Jews, Muslims, Parsees and Buddhists were all received by Gurudev with equal respect and entertained with uniform love and hospitality.

Where service is concerned, even the distinction of sex disappeared. Once during the early days of Gurudev's stay at Rishikesh, a young South Indian lady who was staying at the

Kalikamliwala Resthouse fell ill. She was advised by its Manager to consult Gurudev which she did. Gurudev gave her some medicine. In those days, Gurudev regarded massaging the feet of patients with repetition of the Lord's Names as being more efficacious than merely giving a pill or an ounce of mixture. Almost involuntarily Gurudev got ready for the massage. The young lady was modest and shy. Gurudev gave it up. After he had returned to his Kutir, Gurudev reflected over the matter and said to his disciple: "Why did I fail to render the service that was necessary in her case? She might have felt differently, but I should not have neglected the opportunity of massaging the legs of the lady. Why, the same Atman that dwells in me dwells in her too. No, I should not have shrunk back from the service." Early next morning Gurudev, along with his disciple, called on the lady again, gave her the usual medicine and explaining that he saw only the Divine Mother of this universe, begged to allow him, her child, to massage her feet. What the medicine could not do for her, this magic massage did, and she at once recovered.

On His Back: When the need arose, Gurudev was ready to do any service. His broad physical frame and his muscular strength were often of great service to him. He went on a pilgrimage to Gangasagar, along with the aged Maharani of Singhai. Pilgrims had to wade through the waters of the sea for a few yards; the Maharani could not

do that. Gurudev at once lent his broad shoulders. The Maharani was reluctant, but without the least hesitation Gurudev carried her on his shoulders to the boat.

On another occasion, at the palace of the Singhai Maharani at Lucknow, a Sannyasini became infuriated when the Maharani declined to satisfy her inordinate demands for money to perform some kind of worship. In the frenzy of anger she lost all control and fell down unconscious. Gurudev carried her on his own shoulders to the nearby hospital and had her attended to.

In Defiance of Danger: There is no danger in true selfless service. It is the realm divine where the faithful have absolute immunity. During the early days of Gurudev's life at Swarg Ashram, he had earned a reputation for daring to venture into regions where those who had any love of life would not even peep. Cholera and typhoid cases were earmarked for him. Swami Anantanandaji was suffering from cholera of a virulent type. People feared to go anywhere near his hut. Gurudev was in constant attendance at the Swamiji's bedside. He would with his own hands clean the bed pan and wash the excreta from the patient's body. When Sri Veeraraghavachari's disciple similarly suffered from cholera, it was Gurudev who volunteered to attend to him. Sri Swami Kalyananandaji was wonderstruck at this service

and built a shed in Gurudev's abode. Whenever Kalyananandaji fell sick, he would send for Gurudev and none else. "Whatever you give with your miraculous healing hand will cure me", he would say.

Gurudev had absolutely no repulsion or dislike to handle the offensive discharges of patients. When Sri Swami A. was ailing, Gurudev readily and without the least hesitation, inserted his finger into the rectum and removed the fecal matter.

Hallmarks of Service: The three great hallmarks of Gurudev's selfless service have always been compassion, tolerance and a resolute determination not to see evil. His compassion did not demand any justification for giving money or food to old people who walked into the Ashram without the least idea of serving it or even of leading a life of renunciation. In other words, they approached Gurudev only to be fed by him, to be clothed by him and to be provided by him with shelter. Gurudev once remarked: "The state is not at present looking after these aged people, so it is my duty to feed them, clothe them and provide them with a shelter."

Gurudev's tolerance had no limit. Sri Swami X did some service to the institution, then began to lead a retired life of comfort without work. Gurudev would not ask him to work or to leave the Ashram. "For the work that he has done, I am

bound to look after him for five or six lives to come", said he. Even though he himself is ever busy in the service of humanity, he would never find fault with another for not following his example.

Gurudev could see no evil at all anywhere. And there was nothing that he would not forgive. This happened on the night of the 8th January, 1950. A disgruntled man whom Gurudev had been maintaining in the Ashram out of the purest compassion, without asking him to give even a bit of his time or energy to the service of the Ashram, admitted the devil into his heart. In an unbalanced state of mind, the idea entered into him that he should hurt the all-merciful Gurudev. At night, when Gurudev was seated in the Satsanga, this man aimed three blows at Gurudev's head with an axe. A miracle happened. Gurudev was not even injured. When in the then dim light of the Bhajan Hall they realised the horrible truth, the assailant was at once caught hold of by the people who began hitting him. Gurudev saved the poor man that night and spontaneously he shouted at those who were beating the cruel assailant: "Don't beat him; don't beat him!" Truly, like the Christ, Gurudev rescued the man who had come to injure him! He would not even file a complaint against him; on the other hand he bowed to him and asked: "Are you satisfied? Do you want to give me some more?" What love! The next morning, when the Ashram

authorities had decided to send the man to his native place, Gurudev himself gave him a hearty send-off after presenting him with nice new clothes, money for train fare, pocket expenses and books; and he prostrated to the assailant as he left the Ashram. None but Gurudev could have done this. On a later occasion he revealed, "I hold Jayadeva as my ideal. Jayadeva was robbed by dacoits who cut off his hands and threw him into a well. When the Gods brought a celestial car to take him to paradise, he refused to ascend it, till the dacoits who had cut off his hands were taken there. That is my ideal." Let us worship the dust made holy by the feet of this embodiment of non-violence. May the holy dust purify our heart.

"Honour those who are bad characters. Serve the rogue first. Treat him as a future saint, as a saint himself. This is the way to purify your heart and to elevate him also," said Gurudev. He always took the greatest delight to serve them. In one of his earliest letters to Sri Swami Paramanandaji (written some time in 1934-35) Gurudev said: "I want around me a number of people who will abuse me, vilify me, insult me and even injure me. I want to serve them, educate them and transform them." In a crowd he would seek out the bad characters whether they were in white or ochre-robcs and greet them with folded palms. He would give them his books in plenty, money and clothes too. He would address them in the most respectful terms. Revealing the secret of this

attitude towards them, Gurudev said: "Acclaim the rogue as a saint and publicly honour him, and he will be ashamed to continue his evil doings. Persistently tell an ill-tempered man, "You are a Santamurti," and he will be ashamed to lose his temper. Call a lazy man a dynamic worker, he will throw off his laziness and plunge into service. This is my method. The praise should come from the very bottom of your heart and you must pour your soul-force into every word. You must sincerely feel that behind the apparent negative quality there is a resplendent positive virtue latent in the man. Then both of you will be benefited."

Tyaga of Tyaga-Abhimana

Tyaga means renunciation and Abhimana means egoism or vanity. Tyaga-Abhimana means the egoistic feeling that one has renounced.

One who has studied the scriptures, who has understood the broad outline of selfless service, would perhaps follow all these to a certain degree of perfection. It is well to remember that Sattva, Rajas and Tamas have their own 'hooks' that keep the aspirant back and prevent him from soaring into the realms transcendental. The Sattvic hook is the most subtle of all and therefore most difficult to detect and avoid. With Sannyasa floats in the Sannyasa-Abhimana; it might allow the aspirant a greater freedom to roam a little higher than others, but he is bound. With Tyaga creeps

in Tyaga-Abhimana, most subtle and most dangerous, almost impossible to overcome. Similar is the case with Seva-Abhimana. Egoism takes the shape it is given. Sannyasa, Tyaga and even Seva are transformed by it into its cloak! How amusing and significant is the foolish aspirant's boastful assertion: "I have conquered egoism. I have crushed vanity. I am extremely humble." The spiritual seeker who wishes to strive for realisation of the Self would do well to guard himself and not allow quarters to these subtler Abhimanans. Let us see how Gurudev prevented the entry of this Tyaga-Abhimana.

Gurudev would never magnify his renunciation. On the contrary, he would always glorify the little renunciation of a mediocre aspirant as something superior to his own. He had given up overnight much wealth, a prosperous life, princely comforts and a great position and wandered about as a penniless, homeless mendicant. Nevertheless he would extol the spirit of renunciation of one who has given up an insignificant job which earned him thirty rupees a month, the prestige of a slave.

He would point to an austere seeker who did not wear a shirt even in winter as one who has far excelled him in austerity, and would not reveal that during his Swarg Ashram days he had put himself through far greater austerities. He would give away all good blankets that devotees gave him

and sleep on a gunny bag and wrap himself in a mere cotton Dhoti. He called himself 'an overcoat Swami' as though to belittle himself. But when he presented a young disciple with an overcoat, he would explain: "Why do you imagine that the overcoat is something other than a mere woolen blanket? They are wrapping themselves in a woolen blanket which is clumsy and unsuited to active service. We are wearing the same blanket, cut and stitched so as to move about and work."

The Razor's Edge

Now comes the razor's edge, the subtle middle path that is difficult to perceive and pursue. We should not be arrogant and violate the laws of society, but we should dare to do right even though it might earn public criticism and condemnation. Gurudev said: "If you are convinced that you ought to wear an overcoat in order to carry on your spiritual practices undisturbed and to serve humanity best, and if the thought enters your mind that people may criticise you, at once put on the overcoat. This is the way to get over fear of public criticism. People may criticise you, but will soon understand you."

In Gurudev fear of public criticism was conspicuous by its absence. "What is my duty?" was the question he asked himself constantly. He never thought, "what will they think?"

During the 1930's the old Maharani of Singhai frequently visited Rishikesh. If she

walked along the road in the hot sun, Gurudev, clad in the fiery robes of a Sannyasin, would hold an umbrella above her head. Other Sannyasins would, in their pride of Sannyasa, laugh at this bold Sannyasin serving the mother, instead of treating her as a mere householder and asking her to press his feet. But to Gurudev it was an opportunity to serve, to worship the living Lord; and he felt he was justifying the ochre robe if not enhancing its dignity by rendering such service. Time has revealed that he was right. He rose to be a mighty sage of Self-realisation. Those who succumbed to Sannyasa-vanity have passed away, hugging the external form, the illusory appearance, Maya, which they mistook to be Brahman, the Supreme Self.

Gurudev visited Lucknow during his lecture tours and stayed in the Palace of the Maharani. The old woman was fond of 'Hookah' and her servants were often lax in their duties. Early in the morning Gurudev would, without the knowledge of the Maharani, place the 'Hookah' ready at hand. She had a liking for soda which she took early in the morning. Her servants might neglect to give her soda at the appointed time, but the honoured guest Gurudev, whom the Maharani had adopted as her preceptor, would anticipate his disciple's needs and would keep the soda ready and hand it to her at the appropriate time.

Gurudev was never tired of warning that the

monks should beware of moving too closely with the members of the opposite sex. He sternly warned that the monks should not spend the night in a room adjacent to which a lady slept alone. This is the code of morals. But there is a superior code of morals. It is service. Once, while at Lucknow, Gurudev discovered that the old Maharani was seriously ailing with acute rhinitis. Even her own kith and kin would not have served her with such solicitude, but Gurudev used to sleep in a corner of the room, ready to attend on her in case of need.

However, when the Maharani planned to make Gurudev stay permanently in the Palace as the Royal Preceptor, Gurudev quietly slipped away, undergoing great suffering and hardship en route, came away to Rishikesh on foot, without informing anyone in the Palace, without taking even a blanket during midwinter, suffering from cold and hunger on the way, and yet determined to rescue himself from even the least touch of worldliness.

This is the way to overcome the formidable Sannyasa-Abhimana. This is the most difficult practice. It is only Gurudev's grace and God's blessings that enable us to know when spiritual practice ends and vanity begins, when licentiousness masquerades in the garb of absence of vanity.

Fields of Service

The hidden springs of this Karma Yoga are either Jnana or Bhakti. But springing from a single source, the waters of Karma Yoga spread themselves out over a wide area and play many fruitful roles in the service of mankind.

We see that in the life of this single but mighty individual, selfless service has flowed along many different channels, bringing solace, comfort, relief from suffering, health, peace and prosperity to a vast number of the Lord's children.

It is difficult to say on which aspect of service Gurudev laid the greatest stress. But it can definitely be said that he laid the greatest emphasis on service with the proper spirit. With the correct attitude any service is as good as any other.

Yet, because he saw disease and the consequent suffering of man at very close quarters from his very youth, Gurudev had a 'special corner in the heart' for the service of the sick.

Narasimha Iyer has told us numberless amazing incidents from Gurudev's life in Malaya to show that Gurudev, who was then Dr. Kuppuswamy, intensely felt the pain that afflicted another man. No sacrifice was too great for him in the service of the ailing persons. Rich people could look after themselves or send for the specialists. Gurudev concerned himself more with the poor

than with the rich. The poor could not pay. That did not matter, for the Lord had given him enough wealth to treat them free, and he gave them money for the diet. A very close friend of Gurudev in Malaya visited the Ashram a quarter of a century later and said: "We could not recognise Swamij's greatness in those days. We had more or less concluded that he was full of abnormalities." Even during his Swarg Ashram days he went on serving the sick. H. H. Sri Swami Tapovanji vividly recalled how Gurudev used to carry three bags wherever he went: one containing leaflets, pamphlets and notebooks, another containing fruits, and the third containing common drugs. On the roadside, he would stop at a hundred places, making kind enquiries about Sadhus and villagers, and would give them some medicines and also the spiritual literature and fruits! When he was at Swarg Ashram he lived only on alms from the almshouse which consisted of dry Rotis and soup, but he would buy milk, curds and fruit from the shop and distribute them to the sick. In the Satyasevashram Dispensary that he established, he prostrated to the patients and then treated them as living divinity. When he came over to the present locality, he actually established a Dispensary, and all the inmates on recruitment were put through a rigorous training in the service of the sick.

Once a destitute person was lying outside Rama Ashram. No one cared even to look at him.

But Gurudev, as soon as he noticed him, brought him into the Ashram and made everyone of his disciples attend on the man.

He would aggressively catch hold of pilgrims returning from Badri-Kedar and rub their bruised legs with liniment turpentine; he would ask another Ashramite to rub the other leg, thus giving his disciples practical training in selfless service.

It is this Satsankalpa that has taken the shape of the Sivananda General Hospital and the Sivananda Eye Hospital with the modern equipment, in Ananda Kutir itself.

Service of Destitutes

Closely allied was the case of the destitute. "Where will he go? We will have to look after him." This expression has very often amazed Ashram authorities and visitors too, when Gurudev took over responsibility for maintaining a destitute calling at his door. The simplest logical reason for undertaking this duty was that the destitute person had been prompted by the Lord within him to seek refuge at the feet of Gurudev. How was the Ashram to maintain those people? The question was answered by Gurudev with equal ease, "the Lord who sends them here will provide for their maintenance also."

Among the destitutes were widows, the untimely death of whose husbands had left them

helpless; women, the ill-treatment of whose husbands or parents-in-law had driven them out of their home; orphans and old people. To them all, Gurudev was the father and the mother too. To them the doors of Sivananda Ashram were ever open. Gurudev would not question them about their antecedents, about their programme of life, etc. They were in need, and that need was first to be satisfied. A miracle invariably happened after a few months of their stay at the Ashram. Their estimation went up in the eyes of their kith and kin. The 'wound' was healed. There was often a happy reunion of broken families. That was because Gurudev stepped in at the most psychological moment and saved the life of the person driven to destitution.

Hope for the Desperate

This leads us to the case of those who, in utter despair, stood on the brink of life and death and preferred death to a miserable existence. The supreme mercy of the Lord directed them to Gurudev. Gurudev's divine compassion granted them a new lease of life. A miraculous transformation took place in their lives, whether they led the life of a householder or a monk, gloom and despair vanished once for all from their life, and peace and hope reigned thereafter.

This sort of service Gurudev rendered even during his life in Malaya. Sri Narasimha Iyer had

told us how young men stumbled into Dr. Kuppuswamy's house, completely broken and hopeless. They had resolved to end their misery and their life; but the benevolent doctor always showed them the way to end misery and gain life. He looked after them as his own brothers and enabled them to settle down to an honourable life. He would pursue their life's career till they could take their place in society. During his later life this service continued. The only reason for admitting such persons into the Ashram was: "God has sent them to us in order that we may serve them."

People who had suddenly lost their beloved ones, people who received a severe shock in their official or social careers, came to Gurudev for protection. If Gurudev had refused them, they would have committed suicide. They found that they were welcome. Gurudev's Abhaya Hasta granted them freedom from all kinds of worries and anxieties. The sun of hope and joy rose on the horizon of their life. Such indiscriminate protection was granted in days of yore by Lord Sri Rama.

Service of Sadhakas

The really sincere, thirsting spiritual aspirant was Gurudev's God. Gurudev lived for such aspirants. There was only one comparison; it was that of the relation between a son and his father who has only one child born very late in life, on

whom he lavishes all his love and for whose welfare he could consider no sacrifice too great and without expecting anything in return. During his life he worked ceaselessly so that the aspirants in the Ashram could have a comfortable life and uninterrupted spiritual practice. He would worry himself (if he could) day and night in order to free the minds of the aspirants from the least anxiety in the matter of food, clothing, shelter and medical care. No one in the Ashram had greater physical disability than Gurudev himself and there was no one who worked harder. The moment he found that an aspirant was not well, even if he had just a mild headache, he would tell him: "Please take rest!" and depute a doctor and half a dozen other inmates to attend upon him. But when he himself was ailing, he would sternly brush aside the doctor's plea that he should rest the body a little and say: "I am in wonderful health." This was the one aspect in which there was a vast difference between Gurudev's practice and precept. He practised self-sacrificing service which cared not for comforts, but to others he preached: "You should take care of your health." Such was his love for the sincere spiritual aspirant.

Gurudev would do to that aspirant what even the fondest of parents could not do. The moment an aspirant manifested the least trace of a hidden talent, Gurudev would almost 'dedicate himself' to the awakening and the fullest manifestation of that talent in him. Day and night Gurudev would

contemplate ways and means of enabling him to express himself fully for the benefit of mankind. Some of the departments in Ananda Kutir were created and nourished in this manner. A young man who said he knew the technique of paper-manufacturing joined the Ashram. The next morning Gurudev asked for the pits to be dug and raw materials to be ordered to enable this young man who had no credentials whatsoever (and none was ever asked for by Gurudev) to experiment with his ideas. A good musician joined the Ashram. The very next day a new harmonium and tabla were sanctioned. Gurudev himself would take such a keen interest in all these enterprises that you would think that he was waiting just for you to come and help him in his work. So thorough was his enthusiasm that in a brief while he would give you suggestions for bettering the work in which you yourself were an adept. Such was the case with the photographic department in the Ashram. There was just an ordinary box-camera when Sri Swami Saradananda joined the Ashram in 1947. When Gurudev found that Saradanandaji had an aptitude for photography, Gurudev expressed the wish that he should be encouraged. His thought was so powerful that immediately Mrs. Shamash donated a very expensive camera and Karina gave her smaller one to the studio! Soon after this Gurudev himself began giving tips to

Saradanandaji as to the best way in which the studio could serve the mission.

What was even more interesting was the way in which Gurudev welcomed a cook to the Ashram. The cook had not come to stay. Yet, he himself was surprised when Gurudev told him at first sight: "Please stay here. You can open a restaurant in the neighbourhood. I will do all that I can to encourage you" and followed this up by asking the Secretary to give a room and the necessary vessels to the cook to start the venture. "You can take food in the Ashram and carry on your business for your own profit," said Gurudev. A little later, Gurudev clarified his attitude by revealing: "It is a blessing to live here, on the banks of the Ganga, in Rishikesh. Some day he might be inspired to renounce the world. Until then it is good to encourage even his ambition to earn money. First make him stay here; then slowly convert him to spiritual practice."

Not only in the field of work, but in the field of spiritual practice also, Gurudev created the atmosphere necessary for each aspirant to evolve in accordance with his own individual temperament and aptitude. Never was an aspirant compelled to change his mode of spiritual practice. If you liked to study Vedanta, Gurudev would provide you with all comforts and conveniences and would never ask you to do any work, so that in comfortable seclusion you could

study and evolve. He would openly praise your wisdom and make you a Professor of the Yoga-Vedanta-Forest Academy. Similarly with earnest aspirants pursuing other modes of spiritual practice. Gurudev was keenly conscious of the difficulties that he himself had to face during the early days of his life at Rishikesh. He was ever eager to save the most fortunate aspirants who had taken shelter at his holy feet from wasting precious mental energy in seeking the ordinary creature comforts for the body in order that they might pursue the path they had chalked out for themselves.

Not all people who sought his shelter were good spiritual aspirants. Further, they were the products of the modern civilisation, and before they could renounce the world, the world had already stung them and injected them with the poison of some evil or other. Not everyone could shed these poisons on the road to Rishikesh. What was Gurudev's reaction to them? Gurudev was the sun of the supreme good; there was no shadow of evil in him. He saw only the good in the new recruit; to the evil he was blind. For the sake of the good that surely is in everyone, Gurudev 'gave a long rope' to the evil, gaining one more soldier to the spiritual army. If it was a mere surface defect like a bad eating habit, he might soon get over it in the spiritual atmosphere. Even if it was deep-seated enough to prevent him from rising very high in spiritual practice, he would

work as an instrument in Gurudev's divine hands, and that work would elevate thousands of others. This was the magic of Gurudev. The very person whom the world scoffed at was taken up by Gurudev and transformed into a very useful citizen. The magic wand was: concentrate all your attention on his good traits and magnify them. There was a very great gain for everybody concerned in this. To spurn a man for the evil that you might see in him was a terrible loss. I have never seen Gurudev do that. Gurudev would get very good work out of even a devil, and in God's good time this man would depart if he could not reform himself or if he grew in evil.

Cultivating Saints

The greatest service that a good man can ever render to humanity is to leave behind him many images of himself. That was the service in which Gurudev excelled. He was a philosopher's stone with a magnetic force. He attracted all metal to himself and transformed everything into pure gold. He had the knack of transforming stones into jewels. How did he do that?

He superimposed saintliness on all. He outright ignored a thousand vices and emphatically exalted a single virtue that may by mere accident adhere to a corner of the personality. He condemned none. He disregarded none. To him there was no wicked man on this

earth who did not have his own good points. None was incorrigible. In his vision the eternal sinner did not exist. He saw God and godliness everywhere; and the supreme dynamism in him transmitted through that vision his own soul force which instantly awakened the dormant goodness in all and strengthened virtue where it existed. Even the beneficiary was unaware of this.

No sacrifice was too great for Sri Gurudev in this work, in moulding people into saints. It was in his attitude towards them that he manifested the highest degree of adaptability. The aspirant might yield to the sage's sculpturing of his personality. He was then truly blessed, indeed. Or, he might manifest his weakness. He might even have rebelled against his own benefactor. Gurudev's forbearance was often severely tested. Falsely imagining that he was a saint even at birth, this foolish aspirant might have resented the chisel with which Gurudev tried to create a form out of the shapeless mass that the aspirant was. A beloved son might anger his father by such behaviour; but Gurudev would suspend the chiseling, shower his love upon the ignorant man and allow him time to come to his senses. The young man might even go away from the protective shelter of the Mahapurusha. Strangely enough the very Master who had taken the greatest interest in shaping the Sadhaka, would look on apparently unconcerned as the misguided aspirant, yielding to egoism, anger or greed,

shattered in a moment the beautiful edifice, constructed during years of patient and persevering labour.

Gurudev would do anything to prevent an aspirant straying away from the path or retracing his steps. There was no offence or sin which he would not pardon; and if it was a minor weakness or love of luxury that tempted the aspirant, Gurudev would supply it himself, thus immediately preventing the greater downfall, with the conviction that sooner or later the aspirant would get over the weakness and abandon the luxury. By all means the aspirants should be saved from getting irretrievably lost to the order of renunciation.

But, though this was very rare, the aspirant might be obstinate in his foolish resolve. It was then that Gurudev performed the greatest miracle. The aspirant had to learn more lessons, there was need for him to walk a few more paces on the burning sands of the world before he could truly appreciate the blessings of the oasis, nay, paradise that were Gurudev's lotus-feet. But before Gurudev coolly gave leave for the aspirant to go, he unobtrusively spread over him the invisible armour of his blessings. Where would this man get the love, the freedom from cares and anxieties that he enjoyed at the feet of the sage? He would come back, sooner or later.

I have never heard Gurudev mock at such

people even in jest. Never. When the aspirant returned, he would be treated by Gurudev as though he had always been part of the Ashram and had never deserted it. Yes, so he should have been, and so he was forever; for he was in Gurudev's heart. Gurudev paid special attention to him, as this man was living proof of the victory gained by Gurudev's supreme love. The aspirant too was now in a better position to appreciate Gurudev's indescribable glory, and opening himself with greater receptivity to his grace, evolved rapidly into a saint.

The Uttama Adhikari might grow into a saint by a mere glance from Gurudev's eyes or by a mere word from his holy lips. The middling may scale great heights in spiritual experience after some training imparted to him by Gurudev. But even the worst Adhikari was soon transformed into a saint by Gurudev through his limitless forgiveness, inexhaustible patience, boundless charity and supreme love. Adhikari-Bheda (classification of aspirants, according to their fitness) may govern the rapidity of their evolution to sainthood, but it certainly was not a criterion that hindered Gurudev to go on. Gurudev would transform all into saints. These disciples of Gurudev are the inestimable assets to humanity.

Sivananda: The Shepherd

It was Lord Jesus who gave us the parable of

the shepherd. It was Gurudev who gave us wonderful, actual and almost daily demonstrations of the attitude of the wise shepherd.

If you had lived with him for a couple of years, you would have been astounded at the way in which he trained aspirants. Some aspirants resorted to his lotus-feet in the way in which aspirants resorted to Gurukulas in days of yore with the blazing fire of renunciation, dispassion and discrimination. In the Ashram you would have noticed that Gurudev was very rarely seen with them, nor did they seem to move very closely with Gurudev. Their relationship with Gurudev was on an entirely different plane altogether - the spiritual plane. They were few. The vast majority of the others with whom Gurudev worked and moved very closely were lukewarm aspirants, some of them without the least spiritual aspiration; but they were given shelter by Gurudev in order that, as a result of the material failures that had driven them from their homes, they might not end their life, and Gurudev had often to sow the seeds of Vairagya into them. It is perhaps easier for you to infuse Vairagya into your own son, than for Gurudev to infuse Vairagya into a young man joining the Ashram. Gurudev's heart was all love, and not even for the sake of securing Moksha for the other man would he give him the least offence, put him to the least deprivation or ask him to lead an austere life. I had myself heard

Gurudev overestimate the difficulties that face the aspirants and say: "What a mysterious thing this mind is! How to control this? And then, over and above all, how is man to apply himself to strenuous spiritual practice and deep meditation? I think God should give liberation to everyone, even if one utters his Name once a day or if man does a few good acts of service in his lifetime." If he was appointed to preside over the destinies of mankind, in the realm of the gods, he would have (in the words of Winston Churchill) actually 'presided over the liquidation of the empire' of Maya and granted liberation to everyone.

It was impossible for such a loving benefactor to compel the aspirants to practise austerities. And as I said, the aspirants were in no mood to take them upon themselves! Luxurious living would lead many astray; unlimited liberty would give the widest scope for one aspirant to quarrel with another. Gurudev would often pacify both; but sometimes one or the other would leave the Ashram. Gurudev would try his best to prevent this. He would often tell the aspirants: "It is extremely difficult to acquire a little bit of wealth, but it is very easy to lose it. You take a ball up the stair with great difficulty, but the moment you drop it, it bounces down to the ground in a second." If the aspirant did leave ultimately, Gurudev seemed to forget all about it.

But no, Gurudev's invisible hands would

bring the aspirant back. Where else in this world can he get such a Master? Where else in the whole universe will a Master serve? Where else in the world will a Guru obey your will? Even his own parents will not look after him if he is able-bodied and does not earn. Even a loving wife will not bear with the eccentricities of the husband for long. The cool shade of Gurudev's benign presence had lost its glory on account of over-familiarity. The scorching sun and the burning sands of the world into which he ventured forth would soon remind him of the lotus-feet of the Lord. He would return.

The shepherd would seem to neglect even the sheep that faithfully flocked around him. He would rejoice over the recovery of the lost sheep. He would dance with joy. He would bathe it, feed it and treat it with special favour. You would have looked on with amazement when Gurudev glorified this man in the presence of all and made him feel that he was the most important member of the divine family.

Lord Krishna only said, "*Striyo vaishyastatha shudrah, tepi yanti param gatim*" (Women, Vaishyas and Sudras also attain to the Supreme State). There was Gurudev who ever held out a fair hope to wicked men and sinners. There is a subtle snag even in the Lord's utterance: "*Api chet suduracharo bhajate mam ananyabhak*" (even if a wicked man worships Me, he should be regarded as a good man.) Gurudev, the incarnation of love

and understanding, did not even expect this much from us. As he dealt literally with thousands of aspirants, he understood better than anyone else that the wicked man is so full of evil impressions that it is almost impossible for him to take the first step towards the divine. Gurudev went farther than even Lord Krishna! - O Lord! You do not even wait for us to take refuge in you. You literally drag us to you. You attract us by your sweet songs, inspiring lectures, inimitable humour, loving conversation, amusing pictures and movie films, delicious Prasad, good food, carefree life and all comforts. You demand nothing from us and you give, give, give always. You understand our difficulties, you sympathise with our frailties, and you lead us by the hand. You infuse devotion into us, you inspire dispassion in us, you breathe wisdom into our souls. Lo! One day the world finds that your disciples are wise and talented. But little does it realise what infinite pains you have taken upon yourself to perform this miracle. To you, the good shepherd, it was not pain. You took real delight in running after lost sheep. Lead us, oh Lord! Lead us to thy lotus feet!

Bhavana: The all-important Factor in Karma Yoga Sadhana

Let us consider the fruits that this Karma Yoga bestowed upon Gurudev. Had we been admitted, even for a moment, into the inner chamber of his heart, we would have discovered

the Yogi's secret with which he converted all actions into Yoga.

Are there not individuals or institutions that render one or more or even all the types of services that we have described earlier? Perhaps there are. But then, what distinguished Gurudev in this respect? What does a mere social worker often miss, which, if it had not been overlooked, would have elevated him to Godhead? That is the inner attitude. It is Bhava. It is Bhava that later on blossoms forth as Anubhava. It is a grievous error to overlook this. A single act of selfless service, done in the right spirit and with the correct attitude, might instantly confer the supreme wisdom, the wisdom of the Self upon you. Lifelong service of the sick, of the poor and of society in various spheres may earn nothing but the praise of a handful of flatterers, if you do not have this right spirit.

We should never forget that Yoga is an inward process. Yoga is the union of the individual soul with the supreme soul, and Yoga relates to this ultimate goal. This union is not effected by our hands or feet, nor by any other part of our body, but by our innermost consciousness that is all-important in every practice of Yoga.

It is the lack of this culture of the innermost consciousness that deprives the doctors and nurses of the immortal fruit of their inestimable service to the sick. Let us see Gurudev's attitude.

The primary factor of Karma Yoga is to realise that God and God alone pervades everything. A little caution is necessary not to let the mind escape into idealism. It is all very well to imagine that this world is a play of the mind, or that the world in reality does not exist in the three periods of time. Such a grand realisation is farthest from the man who pretends to have had it. He merely cloaks his unsympathetic nature, his sin-hardened heart and laziness in this glittering attire of Ajati Vada (theory of no creation). If you forget to add a little sugar in his coffee, you will instantly know whether the world exists for him or not. Cheating the world is meaningless. Ultimately it means cheating yourself, and who is the loser?

Gurudev, therefore, gave a clear-cut formula: "Realise that the sum-total of all physical bodies constitutes the Virat (macrocosm); the sum-total of all minds is Hiranyagarbha (Cosmic Intelligence); and the sum total of all the souls is Iswara (the Supreme Lord)." This at once allows a relative reality to the body, mind and individual soul. So long as the world exists for you, the suffering individual also exists for you to serve him. Never forget this. So long as the world exists for you, the poor layman exists for you to express your God-love in charity. Never forget this. The world exists, and all the individuals in it exist, in order to provide you with the vast ground in which to exercise your inner soul and to grow in divinity,

with the ultimate aim of becoming one with God, the omnipresent Being.

Therefore, all opportunities for rendering selfless service should be humbly, reverently and devoutly welcomed, as they are rays of divine grace shining upon a blessed soul. Gurudev would never have said that you suffer on account of your own bad Karma. That is the convenient argument with which we often brush aside the best opportunity afforded by God to purify our heart. In the eyes of Gurudev that was the most unpardonable loss. The opportunity should have been grasped with both the hands and the service ought to have been rendered with all our heart.

It is this attitude that made Gurudev assert that there was no one in the world who did not deserve his service and that there was no one in the world who did not deserve charity. It is this feeling that was at the back of his indiscriminate service and charity. But that is the key to yoga.

All selfless service should be performed with the inward feeling that:

Vasudevah sarvam

All this is Vasudeva (God)

Isavasyam idam sarvam

All this is indwelt by God

Sarvabhutasthamatmanam

One Self dwells in all beings.

Yat-cha kinchit jagatsarvam drishyate

sruyatate-api-va

Antar bahis-cha tat sarvam vyapya

Narayanah sthitah

Whatever there is in this world, whatever is seen or heard, Lord Narayana pervades all inside and out.

If while being engaged in service one reminds oneself that all hands and feet are His '*sarvatah pani-padam tat sarvatokshisiro mukham*', then the service becomes a sacred duty. Then the service is to be rendered because God offers you an opportunity to render that service. It is honouring and accepting His grace. The rendering of the service itself is the greatest reward.

Therefore, that service is entirely and absolutely selfless. Nothing is asked in return. No reward is expected. No result is anticipated. Even if from the layman's point of view, the return turns out to be adverse, it does not affect the Yogi. He does not connect it with the service rendered, but perhaps with his own past action. That then is the secret of why Gurudev was never tired of training aspirants, even if a number of them proved false and unworthy, and of serving them, even if they had earlier behaved badly towards him. Had you offered him an opportunity to serve you, without a second thought he would have served you. What you might do in return to him was not his

concern. The service had already fulfilled itself. This attitude was the secret of Gurudev's wonderful spirit of renunciation and of perfect detachment.

Perfection in Karma Yoga

It is now easy to understand why people were irresistibly drawn to Gurudev's lotus-feet. It was not as though they ran to his feet. In truth, the moment they had placed themselves in positions where Gurudev could render them a service, Gurudev's heart, filled with cosmic love, had already sought them out and entered them. When this link was established, mortal beings that they were, endowed only with the human consciousness that knows but human relationships, they ran to him irresistibly.

It is also easy to understand how people living physically far away from him felt drawn to him and got visions of him. They needed his service. And Gurudev was eager to serve them. He thought intensely of them. Don't forget that the basic attitude that he adopted in service, is that all bodies belong to one Virat and all minds constitute one Hiranyagarbha; this was an Anubhava (direct realisation) for him. Therefore, it is no wonder if he took a joyride in his subtle body to Europe and America and rendered the seekers there the service that they sorely needed.

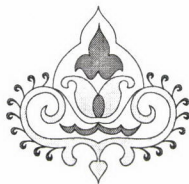
It is equally easy to understand that even if

they did not receive any message from his lips and even if they did not listen to his lectures or songs, people who merely had his Darshan, felt a greater satisfaction than after listening to the inspiring lectures of other Sadhus. By the constant eagerness to serve all and to relieve the suffering of all, and this eagerness itself being a great perennial prayer for the welfare of mankind, Gurudev won the hearts of all. He became spiritually one with the whole of mankind. He constantly radiated joy, peace, life and light. Therefore in his very presence people enjoyed the healing vibrations, the peace giving light-emanations. The joy that they would obtain after strenuously practising the precepts of other Mahatmas, they got without any effort on their part in the very proximity of the sage. Therefore, Gurudev was loved and adored by all.

The Karma Yoga that Gurudev placed before us in the form of his own example, will effect a marvellous transformation in every aspirant's heart. It will powder the ego and annihilate the I-ness. It will enable you to abandon all vanity and attain Self-realisation.

The aspirant becomes a reservoir for the constant inflow of divine grace, and in due time the grace flows through him to humanity. He shines as the saviour, as the beacon light, as the prophet of the New Age, even as Gurudev shone. He does not invite fame, but fame clings to his

garments. He is unattached to name and fame. But - and here is another important factor in Gurudev's service - in an effort to abandon or shun name and fame, he would not abandon opportunities of service. If fame would widen his field of service, if more people would be attracted to the path of the divine by a feather being added to his cap, Gurudev would have accepted it. He would have welcomed fame if, and only if, that had enabled him to serve a greater section of humanity. Inwardly he was not attached to name or fame, but he was happy that he could serve mankind on a wider scale. The wider the field, the more intense the service and the more constant and deep was the attitude that we have already described. Therefore, the inflow of divine grace that washes the Antahkarana clean of egoism, sustained the divinity in him and enabled mankind to realise in great measure that he was God on earth, devoted to the welfare of all beings—*sarva-bhuta-hite-ratah*.



Chapter Three

BHAKTI YOGA

1. *Gurudev was regular in his Japa, Puja, Likhit Japa, Sankirtan and other Bhakti Yoga Sadhana.*
2. *Gurudev combined work and worship as indispensable parts of his Integral Yoga.*
3. *Gurudev accepted the Divine Will with perfect, absolute and total self-surrender.*
4. *He felt the presence of God in all beings.*
5. *He prostrated to all.*
6. *He performed the Virat-Puja every moment.*
7. *He laid great emphasis on Satsanga and prayer. Therefore, he lived and moved and had his being in God, with whom he had attained perfect union.*

Gurudev's external actions were the manifestations of his Parabhakti at times and at others of his Vedantic realisation of Cosmic Oneness. He did not work as we do, for achieving something or for avoiding something. One who is rooted, in the words of the Bhagavad Gita in That 'attaining which man regards nothing else worthy of attainment, and established in which he is not shaken by the greatest calamity', he has nothing to gain nor to lose by doing any work. Yet we found

that he, disregarding the ageing body's claims for rest and comfort and treating with supreme contempt the changes that took place in the physical sheath, was never content with the service he had rendered to mankind. We should not forget that C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyer and Sri C. Rajagopalachariar, themselves great servants of humanity, expressed their amazement at Gurudev's untiring service. Sri Gurudev went on zealously widening the field of his service.

The service was not rendered as work but as worship, as worship of the Cosmic Being. It was the worship of the great devotee (synonymous with the Jnani or Jivanmukta) who has through total and unreserved self-surrender attained complete union with God and thereafter taken on his Nature. What is God's Nature? He is never "satisfied" till the last being is awakened from the slumber of ignorance, till all beings in the universe have attained reunion with Him. Even though there are countless liberated souls ever serving him in His Abode, the Lord runs to His devotee who calls upon Him in sincere prayer. He does not say: "I have inspired and blessed enough devotees. I don't want any more. Why should I go?" I have never heard my divine Gurudev say: "I have done enough work. I have written enough books. I have given initiation to many, and that will do." In fact, he had often told us that he was willing to live any number of years and take any number of births in order to serve, inspire and

guide the children of the Lord to His Lotus Feet. His promise is a boon to us. May we serve his Lotus Feet birth after birth: that itself is liberation for us.

It is very easy to talk about "serving the Lord in all", "serving all with the attitude that the Lord indwells them" and proclaim "work is worship". But it is extremely difficult to keep up this attitude. We therefore begged Gurudev to take us into his confidence and tell us what he did to sustain this attitude. This God incarnate in human form who descended on earth in order to fulfill his promise to take birth again and again to subdue the wicked, protect the virtuous and uphold dharma, gave us some very precious hints. Yes, for our sake, in order that we might watch, admire and emulate, he the Divine Being in human garb did Japa, offered formal worship and meditated. To him Narayana Bhava was Swabhava. Therefore, he was best qualified to teach us how to cultivate this Narayana Bhava and to sustain it. Let us then know Gurudev's Bhakti Yoga Sadhana.

ANTARANGA SADHANA

Japa

Since Gurudev's insistence had always been on the inner attitude, he laid the greatest emphasis on this inward culture of the heart. Gurudev no doubt loved the workers and

appreciated service, but 'all work and no worship' was not after Gurudev's heart. Gurudev would call the man who went on endlessly turning his beads without caring to give a cup of water to a thirsty man, a hypocrite and pseudo-devotee, but he would equally reprimand the dynamic worker who works selflessly eighteen hours a day and ask him: "How many Malas of Japa have you done today?" 'Work is worship' is indeed the motto: but in practice it should mean work and worship.

"The greater the intensity of the Japa done in the early morning, the greater the intensity with which His divine presence is felt within and without during the Brahmamuhurta meditation, the more perfect will be the attitude with which the service is done throughout the day", said Gurudev. Soon after getting up from bed, Gurudev would do Japa for some time even before stepping down from the bed to wash the face. You could set your watch at 3.30 when the switch was put on in Gurudev's Kutir. Gurudev was extremely punctual in getting up at 3.30. He used to be back in his Asana for the practice of Pranayama and Japa at the stroke of 4 a.m.

Every disciple of Gurudev knows why Gurudev had always insisted upon Japa and meditation in the early morning hours. It is because our mind is most impressionable just after we return from the grip of sleep. The effect will be all the more wonderful if we, as Gurudev

asked us to, take Japa into our very sleep, if even during sleep we manage to carry on subconscious Japa. How can we do that? By making Japa habitual, said Gurudev. To illustrate this he had often said: "Yesterday I did not sleep well. My sleep was disturbed at 2 a.m. Then I did Japa for about half an hour. I slept and got up again at the usual time." If we thus train ourselves to utter the Lord's Names whenever we happen to be awakened during the night and of course during the early morning hours, our mind will be filled with God-thought. When Japa becomes habitual, the Brahmamuhurta meditation will become intense and the presence of God will be felt not only then, but throughout the day, during all activities.

It is not so much the number of Malas of Japa that count, but it is the perfection of the concentration of the mind and the depth of consciousness from which the Name springs, that is more important. Once Gurudev revealed to us that early in the morning he used to repeat quite a number of Mantras, a few times each Mantra. He remarked: "Sri Sastriar says that unless one has done Sri Vidya Upasana (worship of the Divine as Sri Vidya), one could not achieve as much material success in life as I have done. Yes, I am also a worshipper of Sri Vidya: I repeat the Sri Vidya Mantra once or twice in the early morning and whenever I happen to meet a lady, I mentally prostrate to her and feel that she is the

manifestation of the Divine Mother Tripurasundari. This constitutes my Sri Vidya Upasana." Gurudev was fond of repeating a few chosen Mantras, standing in the Ganga. This he asserted was productive of the quickest Mantra Siddhi (perfection in Mantra Japa). To the busiest men in the Ashram Gurudev often said: "Even if you cannot find time to do one Mala of Japa, when you take bath, stand in Ganga for a few seconds and repeat the Ishta Mantra three times; it is equal to three millions of repetitions."

Likhita Japa

Mantra writing was greatly eulogised by Gurudev as a spiritual practice that would enable the aspirant to achieve concentration of mind very easily. Once he told us: "Always keep a pocket notebook for Mantra writing, a Mala and a pocket Gita, wherever you go. When you have a little leisure, instead of building castles in the air or allowing the mind to remain idle, write a few Mantras in the notebook, silently roll a few beads or read a few verses of the Gita. This is the best way to acquire perfect control of the mind."

Besides this, Gurudev gave us a number of other ways in which the Likhita Japa can be woven into our daily life. The first is: begin every letter you write with the Mantra 'Om Namō Narayanaya' etc. You and the recipient of the letter are both benefited by this. The second:

whenever you write an article, your daily account, etc. start with a line or two of Mantra writing, thus:

OM OM OM OM OM OM OM
OM OM OM OM OM OM OM

Self-Surrender

Absolute surrender to the Divine Will was the supreme factor that characterised every act of Gurudev, resounded in every word and radiated through every thought. Thus Gurudev became one with God. His actions were aimed at the bringing about of human weal; his words were truthful, soothing and beneficial and also authoritative and life-transforming; and his thoughts were ever divine.

One supreme act of self-surrender was made when Gurudev left Malaya and landed in India. In answer to a query Gurudev stated: "The one consuming thought with which I came to India was 'I must realise God now'." On many occasions he told us: "I never wanted to build an Ashram or to found a Society. I wanted to efface myself completely, sit underneath a tree, sing Kirtan and do Japa." That was the moment when he completely surrendered at the Lotus Feet of the Lord all the aims, ambitions and ideals that had motivated his life until then. Human will had burnt itself up in the fire of Mumukshutwa, yearning for the realisation of God. Even the

desire to render selfless service to the sick and suffering had temporarily been offered in this fire of self-surrender to the Will of God. The man who had been offered as oblation into this fire emerged as God. This was God-realisation in the truest sense of the term. From then on, God became the greatest reality; God-consciousness became Gurudev's consciousness; God's Will became his will and his life became part of the divine plan.

The most marvellous part of this surrender was that every notion conceived previous to this, was thrown to the winds. Therefore there was no repugnance when the Divine Will sought to utilise the medical talents of Gurudev. The healing grace of the Lord made Gurudev's hands its instruments and flowed through them bringing comfort, relief and solace to the distressed. The thought which the 'human will' had projected, that no Ashram should be built and no disciples accepted, was confronted with the Divine Will which had it all otherwise - there was no 'rebellion'. This is the acid test in which many saintly souls have failed; they cling to their own schemes and plans, principles and prejudices. Afraid of public criticism and slander, they cling to the ideas of their spiritual childhood, never allowing themselves to grow in the garden of divinity. Gurudev's attitude was beautifully summed up in his own words uttered in the later stages of his life: "Previously, we never had so much of music in the Ashram. Our Satsanga

mainly comprised of reading from scriptures and singing the praises of the Lord. Now there is a music wave. No one will be able to stop it." This was in answer to a critic. In the 1940's Gurudev would not even allow a harmonium or cymbals to be played during the Satsanga. When God sent talented singers to visit the Ashram or to stay there permanently, and when Gurudev discovered that that was the Divine Will and being at one with the Divine Will, he himself began to encourage music.

Who has ever heard of an organisation being run without any fixed governing policy, without enforced rigid discipline, in fact, without adopting any of the principles of administration? Yet, anyone who has closely followed the growth of the Sivananda Mission will admit that the Divine Life Society is conducted on the principle of no-principle; the carriage of the Society runs smoothly along the rails of Divine Will and Divine Grace.

Organisers would assure us that an institution will soon flounder without policy and discipline. From Gurudev they have much to learn, for Gurudev has shown to the world that precisely because he has let the work be looked after by Him, in accordance with His Will, its growth has been phenomenal. Who can deny that the Divine Will is something infinitely superior in wisdom and power to the human will?

It is easier to do the 'surrender' than to keep it up! It is a misnomer if it is not kept up forever. The fire slowly dies out and is soon covered over by the ash of the self-assertive egoistic nature. In order to prevent this, Gurudev had a wonderfully unique method. It was the frequent remembrance and repetition of Sharanagat Mantras like:

*Hari sharanam mama
Sri Krishna sharanam mama
Sri Rama sharanam mama
Durgam deveem sharanamaham prapadye
Sriman-Narayana charanau sharanamaham
prapadye*

and the Gita verse:

*Sarva dharman parityajya mamekam
sharanam vraja
Aham twaa sarvapapebhyo mokshayishyami
maa sucha*

(Abandoning all duties, take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.)

BAHIRANGA SADHANA

Practice of the Presence of God

Gurudev was the greatest and perhaps the only recent exemplar of the Vibhuti Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita. Those who have heard his inspiring lectures, either during his epochal All-India Tour or on important occasions at the Ashram itself, could not fail to note that he laid

the greatest stress on the practice of the Vibhuti-Yoga.

Is this a new Yoga which you have never heard of? Perhaps you have wondered what Yoga it is that has been described in the Tenth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Gurudev made it a great Yoga, on a par with Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. It is a dynamic Jnana-Bhakti Yoga.

To the list that Lord Sri Krishna has given in the Gita, Gurudev has added quite a few Vibhutis. You will find them in his 'Song of Vibhuti Yoga.' - "I am melody in music; I am flavour in coffee; I am coolness in the ice; I am silence in the forests; I am essence in orange, etc., etc." That is obviously what the Lord meant in the Gita. He had indicated the line of the approach to the practice of Vibhuti Yoga but had not exhausted His Vibhutis, as He Himself admits.

How did Gurudev practise the Vibhuti Yoga? Everything reminded him of the manifestation of God. Even things which would normally 'feed the senses' like music, beverages, etc., appeared in a different light to him. Delicious food no longer tickled the nerves of his palate, but reminded him of God who is the deliciousness in the dishes. Music did not draw his consciousness outward and disturb his mind, but on the contrary, helped to preserve his Sahaja Avastha (the superconscious state that becomes natural and

continuous), for he saw the power of the Lord in music. The silence in forests was no longer frightening; for it was the manifestation of the Lord or the Self. Thus in everything the loving beloved Lord was seen and realised. This practice of the presence of God is Sahaja Avastha.

It is not so easy as it might appear at first sight. The mind is a creature of likes and dislikes. The senses have been accustomed to regard the objects as their food. The mind will cling to or shrink away from the objects; and the senses will run riot at the least chance. These have no place in the Practice of the Presence of God. There the ruling characteristic is one continuous unbroken love for all beings; for the Lord dwells in all.

Therefore, in order that the spiritual aspirant may get established in this habit of seeing God in all, Gurudev asked him to see God in the special manifestations of divinity. "Look up! See the vast infinite blue sky. Does not that remind you of God? Look at the resplendent sun. Does he not remind you of your self-luminous Atman? Gaze at the Ganga. Does she not remind you of the Lord? Mentally prostrate to these manifestations of the Lord. Gradually expand the vision and see the Lord in asses and donkeys. Root out the idea of evil from your mind. When you see someone whom your mind regards as a wicked man, repeat mentally "*dyutam chalayatamasmī* (I am the gambling of the cheat.) See God in him and

contempt will vanish at once. You will neither hate nor dread a dacoit for the Lord Himself is the chief among dacoits — '*taskaranam pataye namah*'. In course of time you will be firmly rooted in the Practice of the Presence of God."

To aid and to intensify this spiritual practice, Gurudev asked the aspirant to select some good Mantra, verse or formula to recite the moment he would see, e.g. the sky:

Akashavat sarvagata nitya

(Brahman is all-pervading and eternal like the sky) and the sun:

Pushannekarshe yama surya prajapatya

vyuharasmin samooaha

Tejo yatte rupam kalyanatamamtat te pasyami

yosavasau purushas-sohamasmi

(Oh Sun, our nourisher, the sole traveller of the Heavens, controller of all, Oh Surya, son of Prajapati, disperse thy rays and gather up thy burning light. I behold thy glorious form. I am He, the Purusha within thee.)

and any light or lamp or fire:

Jyotishamapi tat jyotih tamasah paramuchyate

Jnanam jneyam jnanagamyam hridi

sarvasyatishthitam.

(That, the light of all lights, is said to be beyond darkness; knowledge, the knowable, the goal of knowledge are seated in the hearts of all.)

Namaskara Yoga

Closely related to the practice of the presence of God is the Namaskara Yoga which was first propounded by Lord Sri Krishna in His teachings to Sri Uddhava; it had been totally neglected, especially by Sannyasins, till Gurudev made it an integral part of his spiritual practice. I have heard from Gurudev's Swarg Ashram companions that the patients, both Sadhus and laymen, who went to his Satyasevashram Dispensary received not only medicine and money if they were poor and needed it for their diet, but gratitude and Sashtanga Namaskara (prostrating with eight limbs of the body touching the ground), much to their embarrassment. Even the Sadhus of Rishikesh, the great Paramahansa Sannyasins, had until then unfortunately neglected this important practice, clothing their unwillingness to bend with the high philosophical question "who is to prostrate to whom?". They discovered the missing link in their practice and learnt from Gurudev that, in the absence of discrimination, the egoism stemming from spiritual practice, philosophic thinking, dispassion for and renunciation of worldly objects was a more powerful factor than egoism born of wealth, birth and education. Prostration, done with the proper attitude, was one of the best ways of keeping this subtle egoism away.

Gurudev had constantly worked to instill this

natural humility into his own disciples. Sri Swami Paramanandaji, who was Gurudev's first disciple, recalls his contact with Gurudev at Swarg Ashram in the early thirties. Gurudev taught him that the fashionable prostration of folding the palms and smiling would not do and Gurudev actually demonstrated the proper way, by falling prostrate at the disciple's (Paramanandaji's) feet!

Visitors to the Ashram and those whom Gurudev met during his propaganda tours recall that whenever they met Gurudev, it was he who first bowed down and touched their feet. Often they would be shy even after this to touch his feet, but that never made any difference to Gurudev. He would go on with this practice, until eventually the contagion spread to others, and they too, understood that no practice that enabled them to cultivate real humility should be neglected.

With the prostration, Gurudev invariably used to repeat: "Om Namo Narayanaya" which signified that he was not bowing to the physical being of the person, but to the Lord who is manifest as all beings in the universe. It mattered little to Gurudev whether the man was a renowned Mahatma, a venerable Sadhu, a pious householder, the devil's disciple or a habitual criminal, everyone received his prostration. Even people far below him in age were not exempt. A small boy would be greeted by Gurudev with prostration and "Om Namo Narayanaya", because

age belongs to the unreal body and not to the eternal Narayana hidden in it.

This prostration was not an empty show. It would spring from the core of the heart, from a realisation of the all-pervading presence of God. It was coupled with genuine veneration of all. Therefore, this walking Divinity and Bhu-Mandaleswar never addressed anyone, not even a child, in the singular. He always used the respectful mode of address in plural: 'Neengal' in Tamil, 'Aap' in Hindi. Not one harsh word or insult could escape his lips in his conversation with anyone. He never talked to any person as a human personality. He regarded everyone as God, and he constantly experienced the presence of God in everyone.

Gurudev's disciple therefore, had to undergo this unenviable experience daily. Gurudev would not only bow to the disciple and fold his palms reverently, but would repeat the disciple's name in the manner in which the Lord's Name is repeated. Here is the sacred formula with which he greeted his disciples, as he emerged from his abode in the morning to go to the office:

"Haro Hara, Tat-Twam-Asi, Om Shanti,
Banami Khuda Mubarak, Namah Sivaya,
Namo Narayanaya, Namo Bhagavate
Vasudevaya, Namo Bhagavate... (using the
name of the disciple whom Gurudev would

meet), Namō Bhagavati Ganga Rani, Hari Om Tat Sat.”

We have heard of Gurus extracting service from their disciples, lovingly imposing various hardships upon them and enforcing stern discipline in order that they might evolve. They taught their disciples, using the rod if need be, admonishing them at every turn.

Here is a unique Guru who did none of these. On the contrary, Gurudev himself served his disciples, willingly imposing hardships upon himself in order that they might have all the facilities for their practice and spiritual evolution; he never even dreamed of enforcing any kind of discipline on the disciples. The only method by which he taught was **EXAMPLE**, and without even directing the disciples attention to his example, Gurudev would go on daily demonstrating the tenets of divine life so that one day, some day, the disciple might learn!

Worship

Look at the perfection of the Yoga of Synthesis that he practised. Neither internal worship of the Supreme nor mental worship nor the external worship of an idol of the Lord with waving of lights, etc. did Gurudev neglect. The whole world was to Gurudev the manifestation of the Lord and he lived every minute of his life in this consciousness. Greeting the sun in the

morning, he would offer mental worship to the sun. Even the mental ritual to him was of secondary importance. He would repeat "Om Suryaya Namah" and offer Dhupa, Deepa, Naivedya and Archana in the order how they came to his heart. Sitting on the bank of the Ganga or gazing at the sparkling divine water of the Ganga, he would offer mental worship with milk, flowers, etc. On festive days when particular deities are adored he would offer mental worship to the particular deities concerned, repeating the appropriate Mantras.

Gurudev did not take his afternoon meal without first offering formal and ceremonial worship to the Lord at a small shrine he had in his own Kutir. This was the only item in his daily routine where he claimed and insisted upon privacy. Perhaps to illustrate his own precept that we should pray to Him in secret for obtaining His grace and not ring the bells and sound the conch in order to attract public attention and appreciation for one's 'marvelous devotion'. Only one of Gurudev's personal attendants witnessed by chance the spectacle of Gurudev lying down on the ground in full prostration before the Deity. This prostration was not a mechanical one, nor was the worship. To Gurudev the Deity whom he worshipped, either physically or mentally, was more real than the things that are solid realities to us. Those who had watched Gurudev offer flowers at the Ashram's Vishwanath Mandir could see the

'familiar' look on Gurudev's face as he gazed at the deities. The expression on Gurudev's face was the same as that on ours when we meet and greet a life-long beloved friend. Even so, when Gurudev prostrated before the deity, it was symbolic of total self-surrender, only in his case the symbolism was real and whole-hearted.

Virat Pooja

On no account would Gurudev let us confine our devotional practices only to the Pooja room. Worship in a shrine is no doubt the initial training ground: but the aim which Gurudev constantly hammered into our heart was to treat the entire universe as Viswa-Brindavan and every being in it as Lord Vasudeva Himself — 'Vasudevah sarvam iti'.

There were a number of ways in which Gurudev performed this worship of the Cosmic Being. We have already seen how in serving the sick with Narayana Bhava, Gurudev treated his service itself as worship of the Lord.

On the sacred Guru Purnima Day and on other holy days at the Ashram, Gurudev would keep ready with him a lot of flowers. As devotees poured into his abode or the office, he would first worship them in a simple but sincere style.

When Pada Pooja was offered by an ardent disciple, Gurudev would, after the function was over, go round with flowers in hand and

individually worship all the devotees who had been taking part in the Pooja.

Only those who intently observed the mood reflected on his face and the expression of devotion in his eyes would realise that to Gurudev every devotee was a veritable manifestation of God Himself. Gurudev attached no value at all to ostentation. Devotion is a business of the heart and ostentation only proclaims the lack of real devotion. A remarkable incident comes to mind. On a Sivaratri night we had performed the four Prahar-Poojas in the Viswanath Mandir where on the verandah continuous chanting of the holy 'Om Namah Sivaya' was being conducted by Gurudev himself. After the last worship flowers were offered to the Lord, and the devotees filed into the sanctum sanctorum, devoutly placing the sacred bael leaves over the Siva Lingam. I was watching. Hardly on one face could I detect real living faith. Some threw the bael leaves on the lingam; some half-sleepily allowed the leaves to drop on it, and a few pious devotees performed this ceremony as a religious duty. To them all the Siva Lingam was but a stone which 'somehow represented God' — they did not know how! Last of all came Gurudev himself, bael leaves in hand. The radiant face shone with an extraordinary light. He let a few leaves drop at the foot of the Holy Bull (Nandikeshwara), seeking his permission to worship the Lord. When Gurudev gazed at the Lingam before offering the bael-leaves, he did not

pray nor recite hymns or repeat the Lord's Name: he (his eyes) spoke to the Lingam. It was a living presence for him. What is the expression on your friend's face when he meets you? That was the expression that adorned Gurudev's face as he gently offered the bael leaves to the Lord, gently, in order that even the tender leaves might not hurt Him.

A greater wonder was in store. Quickly, in the twinkling of an eye and unnoticed by anyone else, he turned round and threw a few bael leaves on all those who were there. Gurudev worshipped them. He worshipped the Lord in all, the Cosmic Form. The key-note in this worship is to perform it unobserved, or else it degenerates into a mere empty show.

And it was at Gurudev's instance that in the Ashram special Poojas had been instituted like the Kanya Pooja during Navaratri, worship of the Harijans on Gandhi's Birthday, etc.

Sankirtan

Sankirtan and Gurudev are synonymous terms. Sankirtan has been revived in Gurudev and in this, as in several aspects of his life and mission Gurudev represented a synthesis of the foremost saints of recent times. Like Gauranga Mahaprabhu, he danced and sang the Mahamantra on countless platforms throughout India. His Kirtan transformed many lives,

converted atheists into devotees. With Sri Chaitanya, Gurudev shared erudition in scriptures and a firm grounding in Vedanta, and therefore, his Sankirtan coupled with devotion was born of wisdom and not of blind faith. Like Mirabai Gurudev sang songs full of devotion, and like Kabir Gurudev composed songs full of dispassion and wisdom. These philosophical inspiring songs have all been couched in the English language in which they have travelled throughout the world.

In fact, the very essence of Gurudev's teachings has been given to us by him in the following sweet Bhajan, which all can sing in the tune which he has made very popular, viz:

“Sunaja sunaja sunaja Krishna
 tu-Gita-wala jnana sunaja Krishna.”
 Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise,
 Be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate;
 Enquire ‘Who am I’, know the Self and be free!
 Adapt, adjust, accommodate,
 Bear insult, bear injury, (this is) highest Sadhana.
 Be honest, be sincere, be truthful;
 Be patient, be obedient, be tolerant;
 Be gentle, be humble, be noble;
 Be bold, be pure, be wise, be virtuous;
 Be still, be quiet, know thy Self.
 Purification, concentration, reflection, meditation,
 Illumination, identification, absorption, salvation,
 These are the eight stages to Self-realisation.
 Inspiration, illumination, revelation,

Ecstasy, rapture, vision of Truth,
 These are the signs of spiritual progress.
 Find the knower, find the hearer, find the taster,
 (find the seer), (find the smeller),
 You are not this body, not this mind,
 Immortal Self you are.

Devotion, dedication and discipline,
 Discrimination, dispassion, determination,
 Aspiration, renunciation, meditation,
 Service, sacrifice, sublimation.
 Simplify, purify, intensify,
 Simplify your life and purify your heart.
 Intensify your Sadhana and meditation
 Intensify your Vairagya and Mumukshutwa
 Satsanga, Santosh and Shantih
 Seclusion, silence and Satvichar (Swadhyaya).

Re-integrate, rejuvenate, renovate
 Co-operate, collaborate, co-ordinate,
 D.I.N. D.I.N. D.I.N

Do it now, do it now, do it now,
 T.I.N. T.I.N. T.I.N.

Try it now, try it now, try it now,
 K.I.V. K.I.V. K.I.V.

Keep in view, keep in view, keep in view.
 Nishthabhav, Mahabhav, Prem.
 Seek, find, enter and rest.

Enquire, discover and recover.

This is the way, this is the truth, this is life divine.
 Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
 Hare Krishna Hare Krishna

Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

The Mahamantra was of course Gurudev's favourite song. It is a divine boon to the people of this age and Gurudev has left no stone unturned to enshrine it in the hearts of every aspirant. In fact, so fond was he of this Mahamantra that he has instituted continuous singing of this Mahamantra at the Bhajan Hall, and this has been going on since 3rd December 1943, day and night, generating an all-powerful spiritual current invisibly helping all aspirants in their spiritual endeavour.

He encouraged all organisers of Conferences and other important celebrations to conduct similar Akhanda Kirtan to synchronise with the celebrations and assured them of success in their endeavour.

Another remarkable characteristic of Gurudev's Kirtan is that it is non-dualistic! It vividly portrays his ultimate realisation of the unity of Godhead and his catholic understanding that He is thought of and worshipped in infinite ways by people of various temperaments and spiritual equipment. Though the Mahamantra is a common feature at the Ashram Satsanga, Gurudev had his own special songs of invoking various Deities each day: the Sun-God on Sunday, Lord Siva on Monday, Devi and Lord Subramanya on Tuesday, the Guru on Thursday, Divine Mother on Friday and Hanuman on Saturday. During festivals, he would always sing Kirtan in

honour of the Deity adored such as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati during Navaratri; Lord Siva on Sivaratri; Lord Skanda during Skanda-Shasti; Lord Rama on Sri Ramanavami and Lord Krishna on Janmashtami day.

His love of all religions was amply brought out by his songs on Jesus, Allah, Zoroaster, sung on important occasions and whenever the Satsanga was attended by people belonging to various religions.

In this as in all spiritual practices, Gurudev exhorted aspirants by his own example to sing Kirtan for the sake of the Lord and not for showing off. He had no use for much noise and instrumental accompaniments. Neither did he set much store by the frenzied Kirtan that is often followed by a state of nervous exhaustion frequently mistaken for Samadhi. He always asked the aspirants to sing sweetly, melodiously and softly, always feeling that the Lord, seated in his heart, is listening to it. "Such singing will lead you to Bhava Samadhi" he said once.

Satsanga

The bold practical idealist in Gurudev discovered long ago, during his early days in Swarg Ashram, that Satsanga was the fan that would keep the fire of God love alive in the Sadhaka's heart. He persistently discouraged the fledgling from taking a leap over the tower to fly

into the lonely sky, and he lovingly admonished that it would only result in irretrievable loss. The inner enemy of a Sadhaka that is more formidable than even worldliness is laziness. You can reform a worldly man, but the lazy man is too lazy even to listen to your words of advice! And on top of this, if he has the deluded notion that he is enjoying the 'inner peace', well, that is the end of everything good. Gurudev had seen quite a number of well-meaning lethargic people. Therefore, to Sadhakas who wished "to go to Uttarkashi or other places in the Himalayas for intense whole-time meditation, away from the constant distractions of work", Gurudev would mercifully point the proper path. 'Ananda Kutir' would be the answer. There was the forest a few yards behind the Ashram for seclusion, if they really wanted it; or Gurudev would send them with pocket-money to places close by, like Phul-Chatti, Vasishtha Guha, where they could enjoy complete seclusion. But, asking for more than this is the surest sign of trying to shirk work, run away from duty, turn away from saving grace. The sincere Sadhaka would live a life of love and service, nicely and wisely combining spiritual practice with selfless service. Gurudev himself provided the best field for such a practice. Satsanga has a very important place in the spiritual regiment that he has formulated.

He himself never missed any Satsanga at the Ashram, and we were blessed that he did not, for

he was the 'Sat' in the 'Sanga', the Divinity whose company was sought by those who gathered at the Satsanga. To the Sadhakas who made the Ashram their abode, and to those disciples who lived in the hundreds of cities where Divine Life Society's Branches function, Gurudev gave the wholesome advice that they should all pray together, meditate together, sing together. If any aspirant said that he missed a Satsanga because he was engaged in individual Sadhana, Gurudev would ask, with a mischievous smile playing upon his lips and in his eye: "And you had a wonderful Samadhi?" Often he remarked "All that individual Sadhana means, is sleep!" and he would add: "In congregational prayer and meditation, however, a powerful spiritual current is generated and this helps all the individual Sadhakas whose minds are elevated to great spiritual heights by this wonderful force."

Gurudev's Satsanga was unique in many ways. In it were combined Kirtan, Bhajan, music, study of scriptures, discourses, etc. It catered to the needs and temperaments of all; it satisfied everyone's hunger; it appealed to all. Gurudev himself started it with select Sankirtan Dhwani, in which all deities were invoked; and he concluded it with Mahamantra Kirtan and the most sublime peace chants, beautifully expressive of his inmost heart's feelings:

Sarvesham swasti bhavatu
Sarvesham shantir bhavatu
Sarvesham purnam bhavatu
Sarvesham mangalam bhavatu
Sarve bhavantu sukhinah
sarve santu niramayah
Sarve bhadrani pasyantu
maa kaschit duhkhabhag-bhavet.
Asato maa sat gamaya
Tamaso maa jyotir gamaya
Mrityor maa amritam gamaya
Om purnamadah purnamidam
Purnat purnamudachyate
Purnasya purnamadaya
purnamevavasishyate

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih

Prayer

Gurudev was one of the greatest living votaries of practical prayer which rises from the heart, prayer which pervades and nourishes every cell of the being of man, even as the heart's blood pervades and nourishes the body. At the Satsanga and at other times too, one would often hear Gurudev say: "Mr. So-and-so passed away today. Let us pray for the peace of the departed soul." - "Today is the Birthday of Mr. So-and-so; let us, therefore, pray for his health and long life". Then he conducted congregational Kirtan and concluded it with a two minute silent meditation

and prayer. Subtle eyes of intuition could notice the powerful spiritual current generated by a whole gathering of devotees at the holy feet of this incarnate divinity, offering silent prayer to the Almighty to bless the person for whom they prayed. This prayer has literally wrought miracles.

Apart from this Gurudev always insisted on our praying for all absolutely unselfishly. For instance, while praying for one whose birthday is celebrated or one who is visiting the Ashram, Gurudev would always sing: "May the Lord bless Mr. ... and family and the whole world, with health, long life, peace, bliss and immortality." And he would instruct us, after giving the usual three cheers "Long Live Mr. So-and-so and family" to give the fourth "the whole of mankind".

This prayer was not confined to human beings. An injured dog or monkey would invariably evoke from Gurudev the repetition of Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, in the same way as a sick man would. A dead lizard on Gurudev's path would earn Mahamantra Kirtan for the peace of the soul. To Gurudev all beings were equal, and prayer was universal.

Gurudev asked us to make our entire life one long prayer by living for the realisation of God, for the service of humanity. Selfless, egoless service is practical prayer. Prayer is the key to success in life and spiritual practice. For, prayer is nothing but

recognition of the Omnipotence, Omniscience and Omnipresence of God and of the finite and weak nature of the individual itself. Prayer enables man to conquer this weak nature and to share the divine glory of the Lord. Prayer is the constant constituent of self-surrender and of the practice of devotion. Until prayer becomes habitual, a second nature, Gurudev exhorted us to take the help of any prop that was available to us. Temples, idols, images, pictures of God and saints and sacred books; and these should be made the best use of to keep up the current of prayer. Gurudev himself set the best example. He belonged to the pure monistic school of philosophy; but in his day-to-day life he was a Parabhakta who saw God in everything and therefore did not deny His presence in the idols and images. In his room was a picture of God; in his Office were pictures of Gods; in the Satsanga Hall there were pictures of various Gods and Goddesses. To him they were not pieces of paper, but living manifestations of God. He did not, as almost everyone does, hang a picture with the best of intentions and then forget all about it! He wove their existence into his daily routine. As soon as he entered the office, he glanced at them all. They were part of his 'Staff'. And, when he gazed at them, his heart would be saying: "So, here I am, to do Your will as Your instrument". A moment's silent prayer was offered by Gurudev before he commenced his work. When one department was finished and the other

department's work was about to commence, or when one visitor left and the next was about to enter, Gurudev would lean back in his chair, close one eye and with the other just throw a glance at one of the pictures of God. That split-second was eternity, infinity, supreme peace and bliss. Thus the contact with the Absolute was continuously kept up. Gurudev was so serious about this spiritual practice that if one picture was removed from where it was, he would notice it at once and have it restored to its place. What need had Gurudev, the Supreme Being, to resort to these props to devotion, when he was consciously rooted forever in Brahmic Consciousness? —Only to set an example for us to follow.

Look at the beautiful and soul-elevating Universal Prayer that Gurudev has composed:

Universal Prayer

O Adorable Lord of Mercy and Love!

Salutations and prostrations unto Thee.

Thou are Sat-Chit-Ananda.

Thou art Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute,

Thou art Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Omniscient;

Thou art the Indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,

Equal vision, balanced mind,

Faith, devotion and wisdom.

Grant us inner spiritual strength

To resist temptations and to control the mind.

Free us from egoism, lust, greed and hatred:
Fill our heart with divine virtues

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms.

Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms.

Let us ever remember Thee.

Let us ever sing Thy Glories.

Let Thy Name be ever on our lips.

Let us abide in Thee forever and ever.

What doubt is there that one who offers this prayer morning and evening would obtain the Lord's choicest blessings and rapidly evolve towards the Godhead to shine as a liberated soul here and now?

Siddhi

What achievement can be greater in this world than the achievement of God-realisation, the supreme reward of Bhakti Yoga? Darshan of God, seeing God face to face as the greater Reality than all else in the world, this is the fruit of Bhakti Yoga. Gurudev himself did not trumpet his realisation nor did he go about talking about his wonderful realisation or vision of God. The philosophy he applied to himself and to all others was 'know him by his works'. Palmists and persons endowed with psychic power of clairvoyance assured us that even before he got himself permanently established in the highest plane of Cosmic Consciousness, Gurudev had a face to face vision of God not less than three times,

and that, mark this well, he had had the first even before he left Malaya and renounced the world.

To us however mattered, what he was able to do to us. He was able to render to mankind the greatest help of the highest type. Some people who have had some kind of hallucination, parade the streets proclaiming that they have seen God; and if perchance they are endowed with a trace of psychic power, they would barter God and His Grace for a loaf of bread. Mankind is not saved, but deceived by them. In Gurudev humanity had a Saviour. In his very presence people experienced supreme joy, peace and contentment. His very look elevated, transformed and sublimated everything. Godliness wafted around him: the darkness of atheism, worldliness and undivine elements vanished from the heart which was penetrated by the light of Gurudev's grace.

Miraculous cures had been effected by prayers conducted by Gurudev at the Ashram. People who had faith attained the object of their desires by opening their heart to Gurudev, by sincerely praying to him and by devotedly serving him. Quite a number of these experiences of devotees were published in the book "Miracles of Sivananda".

Those well-versed in Mantra Shastra know that initiation will be fruitful only if it is given by one who has attained Siddhi or perfection in it. Gurudev readily initiated every devotee who

approached him into any Mantra that the devotee chose. Instances have been countless when the devotee felt that the initiation was the turning point in his career, the day on which he began to experience inward peace and inexpressible bliss. Naturally, for Gurudev had attained atonement with the Godhead, the goal of all Mantras; and thus he had earned Siddhi in all Mantras. Gurudev himself was the supreme channel through which Divine Power and Grace flowed. During the Mantra Diksha ceremony, when Gurudev repeated the Ishta Mantra for the disciple to utter it after him, the Mantra was instantly linked to the spiritual force of Gurudev which enlivened the Mantra and implanted its flaming spirit in the inmost core of the recipient's heart. Those who had thus been initiated by Gurudev, they attained Mantra-Siddhi very easily.

The wonderful Siddhis he demonstrated through his soul-elevating Sankirtan, you ought to listen to a description by a participant in one of the early Sankirtan Conferences over which Gurudev presided. Those were the days when fashion reigned supreme and educated people were shy to repeat God's Name. And there were those who were against singing the Names of the Avatars of God like Rama and Krishna, since God was ultimately nameless and formless. That was their view. Listening to Gurudev for a brief while was the remedy they needed; they invariably sang the Divine Name and danced with him on the

public platform, throwing their delusion, their foolish fashions and their doctrines to the winds. What miracle can be greater than this? Gurudev became such an embodiment of supreme devotion to the Lotus-Feet of the Lord that anyone who came into contact with him received the waves of devotion in spite of himself.

By his own glorious example Gurudev has demonstrated that the true devotee of the Lord is completely free from evil qualities like jealousy, hatred, anger, pride, etc. Gurudev rejoiced at the prosperity of all institutions, blessed and promoted the cause of what we regard as rival societies and was admiration for all. This is a very rare divine virtue, which even great ones often lack; and its presence in Gurudev in its positive, dynamic, aspect was the fruit of the practice of intense devotion, the practice of ceaseless devotion to the all-pervading Divinity.

Gurudev's Divine Life Mission, the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy, the Ashram and Sivananda Nagar that have grown up rapidly on the bank of the Holy Ganga are the most tangible proof of the mysterious power that this Divinity and incarnate Godhead possessed. His every-day life and his mode of conducting these institutions were a living commentary on the famous Gita couplet.

*Ananyaschintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate
Tesham nityabhiyuktanam yogakshemam
vahamyaham.*

In this couplet, the Lord promises to look after the welfare of the devotee who thinks of Him constantly. Gurudev, the merciful, has demonstrated in his life and mission, the dynamic way in which this ceaseless remembrance of God can be kept up and also the total freedom from cares and anxieties that the devotee earns by constantly dwelling in the Lord in this manner. Those who enjoy lovely Shivanandanagar, who dwell in it and partake of its comforts, let them not forget that every brick of the numerous buildings and every one of its varied activities owes its existence to this Divine Being who, in order to demonstrate the glory of devotion to God, walked into Rishikesh with nothing than the shirt on his back and without a penny, lived on alms for a number of years, served and worshipped the Lord in multifarious dynamic ways, and today there is this wonderful institution admired the world over.

Once Mahamahopadhyaya Pundit Chinnaswami Sastrigal, ex-Principal of the Sanskrit College Calcutta, said: "Divine grace and divine power are supporting Sivananda. Otherwise, no man would have been able to do such tremendous work in such a short span of time."

Mahakavi Sundaresa Sarma of Tanjore agreed with him and remarked: "Ishwara Shakti or divine power is helping Sivananda. He has done a lot of Aradhana or divine worship. Therefore, he

has done such a magnificent spiritual work. No human effort can possibly do such a great work."

Mahamandaleshwar Sri Swami
Vishnudevanandaji Maharaj of Kailas Ashram, who officiated as the Acharya during the Sannyas Diksha of Gurudev, said: "This place was all forest some years ago. Tigers were roaming about. Sivananda has converted a jungle into a Mangal (an auspicious place). His great spiritual work is all due to his Aradhana of Ishwara or worship of the Lord."



CHAPTER FOUR

RAJA YOGA

1. *Gurudev was established in his own teachings: Never hurt others' feelings – be kind to all.*
2. *His compassion extends to all creatures of the earth.*
3. *Gurudev had not only practiced the usual forms of Tapasya. "Bear insult and bear injury" is the greatest Tapasya he practiced.*
4. *Gurudev was an adept in the battlefield Pratyahara: withdrawing the rays of the mind even amidst the din and bustle of intense activity.*
5. *Gurudev was regular in his meditation.*
6. *He shunned Siddhis which clung to him.*
7. *The superhuman work that he has done is the fruit of this practice of Raja Yoga.*

Ahimsa

The divine qualities that constitute the first two Angas of the Ashtanga Yoga were born with Gurudev. Each quality would require several births for a Sadhaka to acquire; but all of them had become second nature to Gurudev. Therefore,

his actions portray the perfection that is possible in these Yamas and Niyamas.

Ahimsa, for instance, was inevitable to him. He was incapable of wounding the feelings of anyone, of uttering a harsh word or of entertaining a thought of hatred or ill-feeling towards anyone. I have seen that nothing in the world could ever make him restless except the thought that a well meant word, misunderstood by a disciple, might have hurt his feelings. It had happened only once in all the years I had been with Gurudev, when a guilty conscience had been pricked by a noble piece of advice given by Gurudev—the extent to which he went in order to convince that devotee that he had the highest opinion of him and that he lived only to serve him, was incredible.

The methods he adopted to reform a resistant disciple were even more wonderful. First: he took special care of him and made him feel that he was Gurudev's beloved. This ought to make him feel ashamed and try to justify the confidence reposed in him by Gurudev. Second: he would extol and glorify the disciple's abilities and inspire him to plunge into some useful work. If the first method was not sufficient, the second one ought to be, for it would leave no room for the disciple to manifest the evil tendency. Third: prayer. Gurudev prayed for the enlightenment of the wicked disciple. He

aimed shafts of his soul-force at the citadel of evil in the heart of the aspirant.

If all these were not strong enough to combat the undivine element in the Sadhaka, and if Gurudev had to use the more direct method of talking to him, then the loving counsel was preceded and followed by several days of special care and attention. By this special treatment Gurudev won the heart of the disciple. If this love treatment did not remove the impurity, it at least would melt the heart fit to be shaped by Gurudev as he chose. When the great moment arrived and the advice had to be given, Gurudev would begin by openly praising the disciple's good qualities. Sandwiched between these high praises would be a few words: "There is just this weakness that you have to get over, and then you will shine as a modern Sankaracharya." The nail would be hit right on the head, but it would not hurt. Perhaps late at night, when the Sadhaka recapitulated what Gurudev had said that morning, he would realise that he deserved Gurudev's admonitions and would resolve to live up to Gurudev's expectations. In the river of milk and honey that would once again flow from Gurudev to the disciple, in order that even the possibility of a wound in the heart could be averted, the disciple would swim for a considerable time after this, leaving the land of evil far behind.

No doubt, his writings are full of stern

admonitions, and his lectures too contain quite a few of them; but in conversation he was always all love, all praise, all encouragement. In fact in his efforts to reform a disciple, he would often use his writings. For instance, if an aspirant had a bad temper, Gurudev would write an article on the method of getting over anger and ask the aspirant to read or copy it. Sometimes, Gurudev would exhort the aspirant himself to write such an article. This would definitely have the desired effect of enabling the aspirant to realise his folly. The solution that he offered in the article for others to conquer anger, applied to his own blessed self. Gurudev would read and appreciate the article and in conversation with someone else remark: "It is very easy to advise others, but difficult to practise." Thus would the aim be achieved. The direct method was only the last resort.

"Never hurt others' feelings: be kind to all", this was one of the most emphatic teachings of Gurudev, and no one practised it to such perfection than he. In fact, he disapproved even of righteous indignation. The methods he adopted to deal with situations where other Masters would demand and justify 'the use of the rod', were none other than the mottos he placed before us all — Serve, Love, Meditate. Serve the person you wish to mould and to reform; love him; meditate and pray for him. This is the path of non-violence.

To Gurudev, non-violence was the positive virtue of cosmic love. Love in thought, word and deed. Love in everyday life, every minute, with every breath. He was established in non-violence, and the touchstone was that he could not bear for a moment the sufferings of others, without literally running to relieve the pain. When Gurudev was taking bath in the Ganga, and a living insect came floating by, struggling for life, he would take it into his palm and leave it on the bank. He revealed to us without the least trace of disgust on his face, "If a worm or an insect is struggling for life in fecal matter, I will remove it and protect it."

He would not even allow others to harm any being on earth. I have seen this with my own eyes. An Ashramite had taken out the cot on which Gurudev used to sleep and discovered that it was an abode of bugs. 'Guru-Bhakti' surged up in his heart, and he wanted to exterminate the little devils that disturbed Gurudev's sleep. He prepared a big swab and dipped it in kerosene oil and began to apply it to all the hideouts of the bugs. The bugs were lucky - and why not, for they had enjoyed Gurudev's holy company every night. Gurudev appeared on the scene and a look of intense pain on his face halted the disciple's destructive process. "Oji, please don't do this" said Gurudev. "But Swamiji, this cot is full of bugs, and that is why Swamiji is unable to sleep", replied the disciple. "It does not matter. Take the

cot and leave it in the jungle for a few days; and in the meantime give me another cot", came Gurudev's quick answer.

Similar was the protection that the rats that had taken refuge in Gurudev's dwelling, got from him. A few of them began to eat away the papers and destroyed the bedding and clothes. The servants working there caught them and all that they could do was to give them a joyride in a cosy gunny bag; but the rats invariably returned the very evening. They even began to appeal to Gurudev's mercy by nibbling at his fingertips at night! For a diabetic this could be dangerous. An expert arrived at the Ashram, and he gave his expert advice on the elimination of the rat nuisance. Of course, he had no simpler solution than poisoning the rats. Gurudev always listened sympathetically to every kind of topic, whether pleasant or unpleasant, sacred or secular; but for the first time he refused to listen! "Hum, hum," he vigorously shook his head, "the rats should not be killed. On the contrary, we should take care of the things that we wish the rats should not destroy. Manuscripts should remain in a steel cabinet; beddings and clothes too should be well-protected against rats. They should never be killed."

If the expert said anything more, he would have earned regular food for the rats, as the others who had pleaded that the monkeys living in the Ashram's neighbourhood should be driven away.

Gurudev quickly countered this suggestion by sanctioning a regular supply of grams for the monkeys!

Gurudev, the Apostle of Peace and Love, adopted this wonderful method of spreading love among all beings, and the method was of placing his own sublime life as an example for all to emulate. His apostolic mission was not confined to platform lecturing and pamphleteering, but to the adoption of practical methods of compelling all those who gathered in his fold, all those whom his message reached, to love all and to serve all beings. His spiritual diary is one such life-transforming agent in which the Sadhaka is asked to record the number of hours of selfless service he does every day, and the number of times he got angry with others, the former representing the positive manifestation of cosmic love and the latter representing the eradication of the negative manifestation of ill-will and ill-feeling. Columns are also provided in the diary for mentioning the virtues the Sadhaka is striving to cultivate and the evil qualities he is striving to eradicate. No doubt, Gurudev's disciple would invariably choose "love" as the virtue to be developed and some form of its opposite as the evil quality to be eradicated.

Whenever occasion arose and Gurudev ascended the platform, he discoursed not upon high philosophical themes, but on the practical

application of the understanding of the one common Consciousness that pervades all beings, which was selfless service and cosmic love.

Thus, the Incarnation of God radiated the principles of nonviolence in order that the rays of love might dispel the gloom of hatred, disharmony and ill-will.

Gurudev himself said that the person who cultivated Ahimsa to a high degree of perfection would automatically become the abode of all virtues; and Gurudev himself was the proof.

Satyam (absolute truthfulness in thought, word and deed) was his very breath, for he himself was the Light of Supreme Truth. Brahmacharya: Gurudev lived, moved and had his being in the Supreme Being and therefore practised the highest kind of Brahmacharya. Asteya (non-stealing) and Aparigraha (non-covetousness): their opposite evils did not arise at all in Gurudev. But it is our blessed good fortune that he has committed a wonderful theft: he has stolen our hearts and taken away all our sins!

Tapascharya

From among the Niyamas too, we shall single out Tapascharya, the most difficult, for our attention. Saucha (inner and outer cleanliness) everyone knows Gurudev practised scrupulously; Santosha (contentment) was embodied in Gurudev; Swadhyaya (study of religious books):

Gurudev not only read scriptures, but produced them. Iswara-Pranidhana (surrender to God): it has already been dealt with in the previous chapter. Gurudev's austerity was, as everything about him, all-comprehensive.

We know from an eye-witness that when Gurudev renounced the world, he did not take with him more than an extra Dhoti and shirt in a small handbag. The cart of carrying the heavy load of his personal effects, a small portion of his Malayan wealth that he had brought over to India, had halted in front of his ancestral home in South India. Gurudev (then Dr. Kuppuswamy) had let the relatives unload his things and pretended to supervise this operation. When nobody was looking, he slipped away to the railway station to catch the waiting train for his journey onwards. "Onwards!" At Banares, his destination at that time, he gave away all the money he had in charity. Where was the need for money when the destination had been reached? When we were at Benares during the epochal All-India Tour in 1950, he himself pointed out the railway station platform which he had exchanged for the comfortable house in which he lived in Malaya. It was winter. The cold was killing. He had not anticipated it. But his mind was soaring far above the earth, helping the body to ignore the cold and to neglect hunger. The first phase of his Tapascharya had commenced, but to Gurudev reaching the Goal was of greater importance than

bothering about the body, A 'Good Samaritan' had observed this wonderful man, shivering with cold, but so indifferent to it that he would not ask anyone for a blanket. A blanket was the first charity Gurudev received. The hand that gave and gave to all and in plenty, for the first time received alms. This has to be experienced, to understand the magnitude of this Tapascharya.

Someone got him a ticket to Pandharpur. Gurudev went there. He wandered about here and there, in a strange land, amongst strangers who did not understand his language or the ways of this educated robust young man. When hunger tormented him, he would stand before a house and say: "I am a Madrasi Brahmin; I am hungry; kindly give me food." He would not question nor grumble; he would humbly take what was given, silently blessing the giver, and then walk away. It requires a discerning heart to understand this austerity.

Begging was foreign to Gurudev's nature, even though it is in accordance with the scriptures for a Sadhu to beg for his food. So after a while he entered the personal service of a Postmaster. He would draw water and hew wood for this blessed soul! It requires a stout heart to observe this austerity!

The Postmaster soon realised the greatness of his 'domestic servant', and humbly bowing down to him, even as Rahugana Maharaj bowed down to

Sage Jada Bharata, sent him to Rishikesh. Gurudev went into absolute seclusion. Who could believe it today: this world celebrity was in complete obscurity? That itself was austerity of a very high order.

Of course, during this period Gurudev had performed the common forms of Tapasya such as standing in the freezing waters of the Ganga, doing Japa, sleeping on the bare ground, fasting for days on end, etc. But in the later days these were some of the practices that Gurudev disapproved of as of not much value to actual spiritual evolution.

Gurudev was a living illustration of the three-fold austerity described in the Bhagavad Gita (Chapter 17 Verses 14-16) by Lord Sri Krishna: '*Deva dwija guru prajna poojanam*'. How many good and pious people had been embarrassed when Gurudev literally worshipped them by his prostration and praises? This and the others enumerated in the Gita as Sharirik Tapas (Saucham, Arvajam, Brahmacharya and Ahimsa) were natural to Gurudev. But he extended, as I have already said, the definition of non-violence to dynamic selfless service. His Sharirik Tapas led to dynamic untiring self-sacrificing service that he extracted out of his ill-treated ageing body. '*Anudvegakaram vakyam, satyam, priya hitam cha yat*'. Those who met Gurudev knew that Gurudev's words were full of honey and nectar.

Not a harsh word, not an unkind remark could ever escape his lips, for they were not in his heart. A word that does not satisfy the triple test of Satyam (truth), Priyam (pleasant) and Hitam (beneficial) would not be uttered by Gurudev. He would not say a word that might be truthful and beneficial to us, but even likely to be unpleasant; instead he would 'leave it to God'. Gurudev had absolute control over his speech; and this was his austerity of speech. Manah-prasada, Saumyatvam, Maunam, Atmavinigraha, Bhavasamsuddhi: these were found in their perfection in Gurudev. Ever serene, peaceful and cheerful, Gurudev radiated peace and joy to all who approached him. Gurudev did not waste one word; his words were measured, calculated to educate the listener and to elevate his soul. Vain philosophical discussions and worldly topics dared not waste his breath. He was not fond of showing off his intellectual knowledge, and would shame a poking pundit with his studied silence. Atmavinigraha, self-control was there in him to the extent of cell-control. Every cell of his being obeyed him. There was nothing 'involuntary' about him. One who watched him remain seated for hours on end attending a Satsanga, would hardly believe that he had chronic diarrhoea or diabetes or lumbago. Neither sleep nor tiredness could compel him to retire, when on a number of occasions the Satsanga dragged on past midnight. Bhavasamsuddhi (pure feeling and motive):

Gurudev was nothing but this. This sums up his teaching too: "Analyse your thoughts, scrutinise your motives!" he roars in his gramophone recorded speech.

The supreme austerity that he and perhaps he alone among even saints of his calibre practiced, he called the highest Yoga: BEAR INSULT, BEAR INJURY. No Tapas is greater than this. When you begin to practise this, you will know that this is real austerity; there will be terrific burning 'inside'. If it is allowed to die away within, without fuming outside, it will burn away your evil impressions and tendencies, burn away your vanity and burn away egoism. I have seen it with my own eyes. Gurudev smiled and blessed when his own disciples, people who were unfit to brush his shoes, insulted him and injured his feelings. I shudder at the very thought.

Pratyahara

You know already that Gurudev was extremely regular with his Asanas and Pranayama.

In regard to Pratyahara he had something interesting to teach and demonstrate to us. Gurudev himself called it 'battle-field Pratyahara'. In the very midst of din and bustle, noise and nuisance, disturbances and distractions, we should be able to concentrate on a thought or on the work on hand at the moment. We should be

able to withdraw our mind from the external objects and sounds and concentrate it within. That is what Gurudev did and wanted us to do. Visiting Sadhakas often sat near Gurudev in the office and wondered how he carried on his all-important work there. Half a dozen typewriters clattering all around, surrounded by men and women of all nationalities and temperaments, in the busiest centre of the Ashram, where people come and go, run and shout, there the sage used to sit, intently attending to his work, paying as keen attention to it as if he were alone in a cave. The technique has already been explained. Close the eyes and mentally repeat the Name of the Lord every few minutes and thus learn to withdraw the mind from external objects.

Meditation

Gurudev was extremely fond of meditation. The Sadhus of Swarg Ashram recall that in spite of his consuming love of selfless service, Gurudev would frequently hide himself beneath a rock on the bank of the Ganga and would be missing for many hours. Sometimes he would disappear into the surrounding jungle and remain away from all company for a few days; then he would reappear in their midst as mysteriously as he had disappeared. In his personal diary too, there are notes like "I should meditate more: sixteen hours at a stretch."

Gurudev was very regular in his practice of meditation. Early morning and at night, before retiring to bed, meditation was a 'must' for him. All Satsangas and Sankirtan invariably ended with a two-minute silent meditation. Besides this, Gurudev would every now and then withdraw himself and become deeply meditative.

"What is meditation?" we asked him. "It is the continuous flow, like the flow of oil, of God-consciousness within the heart." Well, who knows what happens in the heart of the man who is sitting with closed eyes? Often he himself is not very sure if he is discriminative and introspective, whether he is sleeping, building castles in the air or meditating. There was a diligent Sadhaka in the Ashram, who too was fond of meditation. He would be seen sitting on a rock on the bank of Ganga for two or three hours without moving the body in the least. Everyone thought he was enjoying not only meditation, but Samadhi. But one morning Gurudev questioned him why he was not attending the morning class. He said: "Swamiji, I love to meditate. And I am meditating for three hours in the morning." Gurudev was in a mood that day. "Be careful," he said "lest you should get drowned in the Ganga. You might go into Samadhi at any minute and be washed away by the Ganga." Then after a pause he added: "Do you know the quickest way to enter into that blissful state? I will tell you. Take cold rice and curd prepared from buffalo's milk. Spread a nice

bed with soft, good pillows. Stretch yourself on it. Breathe deeply, with a little noise. Relax. You will instantly enter into that state." This Samadhi is nothing more than sleep. "This super conscious state, sitting on a block of stone like a block of stone is nothing better than that," said Gurudev. The Sadhaka was puzzled. Gurudev explained: "Meditation is communion with the Omnipotent God. Do you know what a tremendous amount of power will surge within you if you really meditate even for five minutes? You can transform the world, you can roll up space like a piece of leather, you can work wonders, if you meditate for a few minutes. What have you acquired by the three hours meditation that you have been practising all these months? Nothing. Better carry water from the Ganga to the kitchen. Your lethargy will go away. Be active. Serve. Then you will know what purity is. Only when your mind is filled with purity, will you be able to meditate."

Now we understand why Gurudev combined dynamic selfless service with complete seclusion and meditation during his Swarg Ashram days. One provided the acid test for the other. Selflessness in service is the touchstone for the depth of meditation; and the natural ease with which meditation becomes possible is the test of real service rendered with the proper perspective. This is what Gurudev asked everyone to practise.

Pranava-Japa

OM, the supreme Mantra, the Name of the Nameless Absolute, has been broadcast by Gurudev throughout the world. During the All-India Tour he sang his OM Kirtan at every meeting he addressed. His OM chanting has been recorded on the gramophone. In the Ashram Satsanga too, he frequently sang his OM Kirtan.

During congregational meditation and Japa, Gurudev always used to ask the devotees to chant OM, a long Pranava, in a subdued tone, six or twelve times before commencing Japa or meditation. This is conducive to quicker control of the mind.

Gurudev hummed the Pranava whenever he wished to disconnect his mind from the world. How was he, the head of this worldwide institution, the Divine Life Society, shouldering the material and spiritual responsibilities of over two hundred immediate disciples and of thousands all over the world? How was he so peaceful and tranquil? The chanting of the Pranava is the answer. Pacing the verandah of his cottage when he returned from the office he would mildly chant OM OM. The thoughts that had so long occupied his mind and heart could be actually seen to leave him in a hurry, and in a couple of minutes his face would shine, reflecting the calm thought-free state he enjoyed within.

Siddhis

Gurudev regarded miracles or psychic powers as the greatest obstacles. He warned the spiritual aspirant against them. Though he himself undoubtedly possessed miraculous powers of the highest order, he never openly admitted them, but disowned them when they were brought to his notice, merely saying, "The Lord is performing these miracles in order to create faith in more and more people." He did not like psychic powers and did not encourage the spiritual aspirant in his pursuit of these powers.

This happened in Malaya. A Tantrik Yogi approached Gurudev and promised to teach him a Mantra which would enable him to do wonderful things with the help of Hanuman. He had only to repeat the given Mantra, smear collyrium on his thumb nail and concentrate upon it: Lord Hanuman Himself would appear there and answer any question. Gurudev liked the idea of doing Japa, but not that of calling upon Lord Hanuman to answer queries. "Gods should be worshipped and adored, not made to serve us," he said and sent the Yogi away with a small purse.

The practice of Yoga, especially the Yoga of meditation, however does bestow on the aspirant psychic powers of a high order. Telepathy, thought-reading, clairvoyance, for instance, become normal phenomena to him. Gurudev was not really conscious that he was doing something

wonderful. When he met you, your inner personality revealed itself to him, as clearly as this paper appears in front of your eyes. He did not have to exercise any special powers. Your mind, your heart, was an open book to him. The thought that you would think, would just occur to him too, and the wish that would arise in your heart was easily understood by him, as if it would be audible to him. It was all perhaps just a happy coincidence. "I also thought like that," he might say, or he would do what you had mentally prayed for and merely remark, "I thought you would like this." You would be amazed, not he. To him it was natural.

It was similar with Gurudev's miracles reported by devotees from abroad. They have seen him and heard him. They are all true. Gurudev did often think particularly of quite a number of devotees, at home and abroad, in order to send them books or to reply to their letters. His was a super-mind, endowed with phenomenal psychic faculties. Therefore, the thought at once established a psychic contact between the preceptor and the disciple. Through this channel the most powerful concentrated beam of Gurudev's consciousness flowed, understanding the disciple's needs and bringing about miraculous visions and messages. It was something like a "reflex action" with Gurudev. It was automatic.

The Mighty Intellect of Gurudev

Besides these psychic powers, the Yogi does acquire some marvellous powers of the mind and the intellect. It was the absolutely perfect control of the mind that enabled Gurudev to give the world such a ceaseless stream of the most sublime spiritual literature.

He was the author of over 300 books, no doubt, but remember that he was the head of a dynamic institution with a worldwide network of Branches, and he managed an Ashram, housing 200 permanent inmates and a floating population of an equal number of visitors. Had you come and lived here for a week, you would have learnt many lessons in Ashram management. How much care did he bestow on each individual Sadhaka who had dedicated his life to him! When a person was sick, he himself would go round telling all concerned to look after the ailing Sadhaka, ensuring that fruits and milk were sent to him, and that proper medical attention was paid to him; and how he attended to the needs of each one of the dynamic selfless workers who had been drawn to the Divine Master's Lotus-feet. The guest was God to him, and each guest should be attended to in such a way that the visitor would feel that the Ashram, even in material comforts, was better than his own home. Then came the financial problems of an ever-growing institution, whose workers were all free and independent to

create more and more debts, depending upon Gurudev to come to their rescue when the situation got out of control, which it did almost every third month. Sometimes Gurudev had to officiate as a magistrate to settle disputes between two Ashramites. Gurudev would invariably side both parties, point out the good points in the pleas of both of them and then sum it all up with a smile - in a few minutes Gurudev had restored friendship and love and had washed all animosity down their throats with a nice cup of tea. In the Office, his Address Register contained the correct addresses of over ten thousand people who were in contact with the institution; and Gurudev himself attended to the vast correspondence and the all-important 'Free Distribution of Books'.

Over and above all these, Gurudev had been able to write the numerous books. And the books flowed steadily from his pen, not by fits and starts in an eccentric manner. He did not depend upon the mood as all of us must. He created the mood, he commanded the mood. He did not have to sit and wait for inspiration. He was perpetually in an inspired state of mind, and he just opened the tap to let the fountain of inspiration flood the world. He did not need a modern well-furnished up-to-date 'study' for his study and writing. The corner of his room, crowded all round with trunks and Almirahs, would do for him. The moment he applied himself to the task, he forgot the surroundings. And, he did not gather material

and then go to a hill-station, as the most famous novelists do in order to complete the work.

Every day at fixed hours Gurudev used to write, and he did this for nearly forty years. He could switch on and off any compartment of his brain. If the 'writing-hour' approached, the organisational part of the brain would be shut off and the writing part switched on. Inspiring thoughts were ready to gush forth, and they did. When the writing-hour was over, the mind was at once applied to some other department of service. The ease with which this change-over was made and the thoroughness with which it was effected, was amazing. This is an important feature, as for most of us an action drags on in the mind even after it has been completed, and its shadow lingers on though the next action has been commenced.

Once Gurudev pulled up a close disciple when the latter continued an unpleasant discussion after Gurudev had dismissed it. Gurudev said: "That is now over. Repeat Ram Ram in the mind." That is the secret. Cut the thing loose, and let it not linger in the mind. Gurudev was a past-master in this art. He used it for various purposes. It was natural to him to take up any work, apply all his heart and soul to it, complete it and then the next instant forget all about it and think of something else. This method was applied to situations where a little friction

could be expected, e.g., in the case of a quarrel between two Sadhakas. When the discussion took on a little heat, Gurudev would suddenly introduce a new topic, make everybody forget all about the quarrel, and when the atmosphere had sufficiently cooled down, reopen the original topic and continue till a decision was arrived at. That was a most remarkable way of settling disputes without ever worsening them.

Gurudev could bring a thought up in the mind as easily as he could push one down and make the mind blank. He did not have to wrestle with the mind in order to remember things. As a matter of fact, the wrestling that we do has the reverse effect and makes remembrance more remote. But Gurudev only had to still the mind, dive into it and bring up whatever he wanted. He was one of the few persons in the world who had never uttered the words: "I wanted to tell you something; but I have forgotten now." The things he had to say to people were countless: directions to the office-bearers on management problems, finding out from an Ashramite if he had returned the basket a visitor had brought with fruits as an offering to Gurudev and if the Ashramite had put a few fruits in the basket as Prasad. Each of these points had been registered in the brain, before Gurudev left his abode; and as he met the various people Gurudev pulled out the thoughts neatly pigeon-holed in his mighty brain, and each person

received his instructions. Presence of mind was one of the greatest characteristics of Gurudev.

Meditation imparted lustre to his countenance, youthful power to his eyes, and irresistible magnetism to his entire personality. There was an aura of peace and bliss around him, and this made all people who approached him feel lighter at heart, more happy and peaceful. People who approached him with a hundred complaints were silenced and enmity fled his very presence.

The aura had actually been seen by some devotees of Gurudev. On a Vijayadasami night, Sri Prof. Sabharatnam of Nagpur saw Gurudev's face shine like a full-moon and attributed it to Gurudev's meditation, particularly during the nine-day worship of the Devi or the Supreme Mother of the universe. In Monghyr during Gurudev's propaganda tour, when Gurudev was presiding over a morning meditation class, devotees actually saw a celestial light around Gurudev's entire body.

Similarly, intense and protracted practice of meditation had a most miraculous effect on Gurudev's mind. It was ever longing to turn inward for a brief moment. During devotional singing, this indrawn look of bliss was clearly noticeable. Gurudev's half-closed left eye had a vacant look and the face radiated joy.

Meditation on the various Deities (Bhairava, Narasimha, Surya, etc.) had conferred various

miraculous powers upon Gurudev. These manifested themselves at the proper moment, without Gurudev inviting them. When he was conversing with you, you would feel that he was your fond mother, full of love and compassion. When he was delivering a public lecture, he roared like a lion. There was a stern look on his face, and the admonishing finger was often raised to inspire you to renounce the world and resort to meditation. When he gave initiation, especially Sannyas-Diksha, there was wisdom-fire issuing from his entire body. He was all radiant, and in that state aspirants could hardly gaze at Gurudev's divine form without being struck with awe. Gurudev himself was unaware of these different manifestations of his spiritual personality.

Most important, however, was his radiation of peace. Sitting in his solitary abode on the bank of the holy Ganga, Gurudev radiated peace and bliss to the entire world. Millions of souls all over the world, attuned to Gurudev and receptive to his powerful thought-current, did receive these vibrations and were benefited and became privileged to benefit others too. This transformation of man's heart in the subtle spiritual realm was as great a service that Gurudev rendered to humanity as his gift of over 300 books dealing with various aspects of divine life - a life of peace, love and service.

CHAPTER FIVE

JNANA YOGA

1. *Gurudev practised Vedanta in all its aspects, in his daily life.*
2. *Gurudev practised Paravairagya and was established in supreme desirelessness. Therefore, he said: "Let me be born again and again to serve humanity."*
3. *Gurudev's Titiksha was all-round endurance of the highest type. It was positive and dynamic*
4. *Gurudev regarded everyone and everything as his Guru.*
5. *Gurudev regarded himself as an eternal student and was ever eager to gather knowledge and disseminate knowledge.*
6. *He looked with equal love and reverence upon the high and the low, the learned Pandit and the illiterate peasant.*

Gurudev was firmly and forever rooted in Brahmic Consciousness and in Sahaja Samadhi. Therefore, though completely desireless and motiveless, he was ever engaged in unwearied action in the service of humanity. He was one with God, and through his personality flowed Divine Will and Divine Grace. This is the highest Brahma Karma Samadhi: where the sage has already

become one with Brahman and now partakes of Brahma Karma. The ease with which he launched forth schemes of universal welfare and the success that always attended on all his schemes are the positive proofs of this truth.

Gurudev's Jnana Yoga was something unique and wonderful. It is here that Gurudev had distinguished himself from the great Acharyas, virtually from every saint or sage of the past. He did not neglect Vedanta as some Karma Yogins had done; nor did he neglect Karma Yoga, as those who profess to be non-dualists are often inclined to do. He had fused wisdom and action and refused to concede that the Vedantin must shun the world and rigidly seclude himself. He has defined Karma Yoga itself as dynamic Vedanta Sadhana or Bhakti Sadhana.

Gurudev emphatically declared that Vedanta provides the spiritual aspirant with the ideal to strive for the goal to be reached here and now. What is the goal? The realisation of the One Common Consciousness. In order not to forget this goal and to keep the inner zeal afire, Gurudev exhorted the aspirant to resort to the company of the wise, to hear Vedantic discourses, to reflect and to meditate upon Vedantic formulae. But the actual practice has to comprise selfless service and devotion to God most of the time. He discouraged vain discussions of Vedanta and did not lend ear to dry Vedantic talk.

“Vedanta is not something to be learnt from books,” Gurudev often said. “Nor can Vedantic realisation be transferred from one person to another. Serve, serve and go on serving all selflessly and egolessly. Worship the Lord. Do self-surrender to God. In due course you will attain Vedantic realisation. When the heart is purified through the practice of untiring selfless service and steadied through the practice of devotion to God, then the Light of the Self must shine in it. Then the Vedantic aroma will waft around you, and all people will be automatically attracted to you. You need not go about advertising that you have attained Vedantic realisation.” That is what we actually experienced during Gurudev’s All-India Tour and in the Ashram itself thereafter. Millions of people crowded around Gurudev at every centre during the All-India Tour in 1950; millions heard him. By mere sight of him they felt that they had got everything. Shad Darshanacharya Sri Raghavacharyaji Maharaj said: “What can a beggar give another beggar? In the world all are beggars, except great ones like our Swamiji. Swamiji is an Apta-Kama. He has attained the greatest treasure, the supreme blessing. He can surely bless you all and grant you whatever boons you ask for.” Therefore, people worshipped Sage Sivananda and got their pious wishes fulfilled.

Gurudev’s life itself was Vedanta illustrated. He practised and preached Vedanta in daily life,

not dry lip-service to Vedantic truths. To him the world of names and forms did not exist. Only Brahman, the Supreme Being did. He had this cosmic vision; therefore he had no desires whatsoever, except the fulfilment of the Divine Plan.

Jnana Yoga stands on the bedrock of Vairagya, and Gurudev was born with it. In his youth and manhood, Gurudev was no doubt ambitious, extremely ambitious; but the ambition was always to serve more and more, to get more and more opportunities of service and not to acquire wealth and amass property. Soon after leaving the Medical College, Gurudev started a magazine; but he distributed almost all copies free. In Malaya, he grew even more fond of giving up things, renouncing possessions and distributing all that he possessed, material, intellectual and spiritual possessions, to all those who approached him. This dispassion in him was always based on wonderful Viveka. Even in his early days he was full of discrimination, and this eventually led him to Rishikesh.

Suffice it to say he was full of the sixfold virtues: Sama, (control of the mind), Dama (control of the senses), Titiksha (endurance), Uparati (satiety in the control of sense-objects), Shraddha (faith) and Samadhana (proper concentration). Self-controlled, with the mind and all the senses under his perfect control, Gurudev

engaged himself in ceaseless service. He had no attraction for the goods of the world and applied himself to doing good to all. Faith was an integral part of his personality. He was all faith and devotion and took up, worked out and completed every work with the zeal, faith and devotion that pertain to a man full of ambition. But Gurudev's inner attitude was different.

This inner attitude demonstrated the fourth of the Four Means, which is Mumukshutva. Elsewhere his very words have been quoted to show that when he came to India after renouncing the world, the only idea in his mind was "I should realise God now." Gurudev, the Supreme Being, who was one with the Absolute, always in all conditions, behaved in such a manner that each of his actions inspired the highest type of Mumukshutva in the aspirant. His actions were so perfectly selfless, egoless, desireless, that they snapped the bonds of Karma. He lived, moved and had his being in a state of liberation, beyond even the desire for liberation. Therefore, no desire, not even the desire for liberation, arose in him. Who will desire a thing that has already been acquired?

Being established in that which is the supreme gain and rooted in which man is not shaken by the worst calamity, Titiksha was effortless in his case. Regarding endurance of physical pain there was surely no-one who could equal him in this respect. Overwork, especially of

the brain, gave him diabetes. The disease had to be kept in check if it was not to hamper Gurudev's work. The most common treatment for diabetes was then, of course, Insulin - an injection every day. And this went on for many years, until the end of his life. Before a qualified doctor was employed for the Ashram's Charitable Hospital, Gurudev himself would give the prick on his own body. During the epochal All-India Tour in 1950, we witnessed one of the greatest miracles of Yogi Sivananda. Strain of unprecedented nature proved far too much for his ageing body. For days together he was running a high temperature. His throat was highly inflamed and full of dangerous ulcers, so much so that a little cough or sneezing caused bleeding from mouth and nose. Doctors were frightened. But Gurudev never even mentioned his condition to the organizers of the Tour and never allowed his physical troubles to interfere with the programme of his soul-awakening service of the masses. In 1952, when lumbago afflicted his physical frame, until it became absolutely impossible, he continued to go up to the office to carry on his routine work, even though he had to climb the steps 'on all four'. When he was bedridden with typhoid in 1954, he did not for one day neglect his service and continued to give directions to his disciples to carry out the work that he would have done. The disease could never affect his powerful super

mind which was throughout busy thinking of the welfare of humanity.

In the matter of endurance as in every other, Gurudev's was not a passive, docile, inert practice, but an extremely active, positive and dynamic Yoga. It is easier to stay in bed, when you have typhoid and patiently endure the suffering; you would be better than the one who weeps and wails and makes everyone feel that there is a patient in the house. But it is far more difficult to endure and be indifferent to the disease and at the same time to think of the health, peace, happiness and welfare of others. It is easier to endure, to put up with an insult or injury, than to glorify, to love and to serve the person who insulted you. It is easier to endure heat and cold and remain at home without complaining against the weather, than to go out in the hot summer sun or on a freezing winter night, to attend a meeting. Gurudev's endurance belonged to the latter category. He had very often surprised the Ashramites by attending to his work in the office, even when it was raining in winter and the weather was forbiddingly cold. During the 1940's, Gurudev himself used to distribute a good share of the food prepared for him to disciples in the Ashram. I remember the hot summer afternoons when we youngsters used to shut our doors against the heat and glare of the angry sun, then Gurudev, with only a towel on his bald head would walk all the way from his room, carrying a big

plate of eatables and go from room to room distributing it to various Ashramites advising them with motherly affection: "Please do not come out; it is very hot outside. Please take rest." That is the positive endurance that Gurudev had always practised in order to set an inspiring example to us all.

Gurudev's Guru

After equipping himself with the 'Four Means', the aspirant is asked to proceed to the lotus-feet of the Preceptor to undergo intense spiritual training for Self-realisation. To whom should an incarnation of God, in whom there was neither Mala nor Avarana go? Gurudev needed no teacher to awaken him to the realisation of the Self, to guide him in his Sadhana and to remove the obstacles on his path. Gurudev himself had admitted that he never felt any difficulty in meditation; no obstacle could dare bar his path. This was so even before he renounced the world, before he embraced Sannyas.

Yet, in order to emphasise the supreme need of having a Guru, Gurudev sought the holy feet of H. H. Sri Swami Viswanandaji Maharaj. Did he? Sometime after Gurudev had arrived at Rishikesh, he had to spend a night in the verandah of the Charan Das Dharmashala. A few feet away from him, a venerable old Sannyasin was also resting for the night. The young man confided in the

Sannyasin the purpose of his coming to Rishikesh. That Sannyasin did not take much time to recognise the future Bhumandaleshwar and hastened to grasp the supreme honour of being his Guru! The very next morning, Viswanandaji initiated Dr. Kuppuswamy into the holy order of Sannyasa with the sacred name 'Swami Sivananda Saraswati' a name which has become a bye-word in the aspirant world. The initiation over, Viswanandaji took leave of his divine disciple and went away to Banares.

The uniqueness of Gurudev's life stands as an example for all, for people of all different temperaments. Well, for the aspirant who should resort to the lotus-feet of the Satguru, Gurudev had set an example. There are others, though their numbers may be extremely small, who are so highly evolved and whose heart is so pure that they do not have to run after a human Guru. What shall they do? Gurudev's own life is their guide.

Here Gurudev's attitude paralleled that of Lord Dattatreya. To Gurudev, whoever gave expression to a noble thought, whoever performed a noble deed, all were his Guru. He listened attentively to the lectures of even baby-souls, lest he should miss the admonition of his Guru. He had often openly declared that his own disciples were his teachers. "I have learnt many lessons from them", he used to say. This extraordinary attitude is extremely difficult for ordinary people

to conceive of. Gurudev has demonstrated that an independent Sadhaka who does not seek and live with a Guru, has to humble himself to such an extent as to be able to treat everyone, even his own servants and disciples as his Guru. Here, as in every other Sadhana, Gurudev had discovered the best means of keeping vanity away from its hide-outs. If you do not want one Guru, well and good: treat everyone as your Guru!

Experience was Gurudev's greatest teacher. From every experience that he passed through and had seen others pass through, he drew the lesson, and this lesson he never forgot. For instance, he had seen in his youth a whole bazaar being reduced to ashes, because the shops had thatched roofs. He drew the lesson that thatched roofs were insecure. Thereafter Gurudev never allowed anyone to live in a house with a thatched roof; he would much rather let you live in the open than in a cottage with a thatched roof.

The lesson he drew from his own experience he would always utilise for the benefit of others. Thus, if standing in the Ganga for long and doing Japa gave him lumbago, he was anxious that others should avoid it. He had learnt from his own wandering life that it was unsuited to intense spiritual practice and solid service; so he discouraged others in their wanderlust. During the period of his wandering he had keenly felt the need for settling down at a place where he could

have (i) simple food without having to beg from house to house, (ii) a good library, (iii) medical facilities and (iv) convenient places for seclusion and meditation. Therefore, he chose Rishikesh which satisfied all these four conditions. When he founded the Ashram, he quickly provided all these four amenities so that his disciples need not experience the want of his early austere life. All these experiences were Gurudev's teachers. Their Upadesha, the lessons he learnt from them, he never forgot.

But Gurudev himself very often pointed out that this path is only for the Sadhaka who is much evolved and who is endowed with divine qualities to a very high degree. The others should approach a Guru, get initiated by him, and practice Sadhana under his immediate guidance.

Sravana, Manana, Nididhyasana

During the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy classes, Gurudev frequently used to pull up a slumbering aspirant and question him: "Do you keep notes of the important points that you hear during the class?" Most often, the aspirant did not! But Gurudev was not like that. "After the class is over, as soon as I return to my room, I reflect on the ideas I gathered during the lecture at the Forest Academy class. Deeply meditating over them, gives rise to their related sublime

thoughts. All these I incorporate in an article and present to the world.”

Here Gurudev had explained in brief the threefold Jnana Yoga practice of Sravana, Manana and Nididhyasana. Writing down the thoughts heard at a spiritual discourse or grasped during the period of study of scriptures is a sure way of ensuring that the mind does not slip into lethargy, and this practice also helps reflection and eventually profound meditation.

For instance, one fine morning, Gurudev had studied a Vedantic text in which the nature of the Supreme Being had been described as Satchidananda. Gurudev meditated upon this single formula, and from this emerged the following poem which he has given to the world as a wonderful aid to Nirguna meditation:

Sat-chit-ananda.

Existence-Knowledge-Bliss.

Truth consciousness bliss.

Asti bhati priya

Life Light Love.

Immortality wisdom happiness.

All mean the same.

Love melts into bliss.

“This is Nirguna meditation.” said Gurudev after reading the poem to us in the office. “Think of Sat-chit-ananda. Think of Atman or Brahman. Then think of the equivalents of the attributes, Sat-chit-ananda which nearly denotes the nature

of Brahman. Parallel attributes will suggest themselves to your mind. Then go on meditating upon them. This is Nirguna meditation. You will have to go on thinking and thinking. Suddenly it will flash within you." It means the Truth.

Similar from the scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, Gurudev selected some passages for reflection and meditation:

Ahamatma gudakesa sarvabhutasayasthitah
I am the Self dwelling in all beings.

Isavasyam idam sarvam
All this is pervaded by God.

Ekameva advitiyam Brahma
Brahman is one without a second.

Vedanta in Daily Life

The realisation of the Unity was not a theoretical concept with Gurudev. It was the dynamic realisation of the practical aspect of this great Truth. The realisation of this Unity is to be expressed in daily life, and this is done through untiring self-sacrificing service and through cosmic love.

This feeling of unity too was born with Gurudev. When he was a young man, his fancy took him to an expert in fencing, who was an untouchable by caste. Gurudev belonged to an orthodox family of Saivite Brahmins. To approach a Pariah would mean to invite the fury of the

elders in the family. Somehow the young man wanted to learn fencing and took a day's lesson from the Pariah. For learning from him just this, Gurudev garlanded him, gave him rich presents, Guru Dakshina and worshipped him. Incidentally, this shows how much Gurudev valued honouring, worshipping and serving the teacher. He had not the slightest feeling that he belonged to a higher caste and that the other man was of a lower caste.

Similarly, when Gurudev was in Malaya, he had gone one day to the studio to be photographed. His cook was with him. Gurudev noticed on Narasimha Iyer's face an eagerness to be clad in the doctor's suit and be photographed like this. Gurudev at once said to him: "Narasimha Dikshitar, I want to see you in my dress and I also want you to have a similar photograph taken of yourself." At once Gurudev gave the cook his own suit and had another photograph taken at his expense.

On the other hand, during the All-India Tour we saw the Lion of Vedanta roaring at a public meeting in New Delhi, at which he had been surrounded by high officials. There he was, Gurudev the supreme, the mighty Incarnation of God, in whose presence Ministers and Judges were but children. They too must have felt the glory that is Self-realisation, compared to which the greatest mundane glory faded into

insignificance. They listened spell-bound to his stern admonitions.

Whether it was a mighty ruler of the earth or a poor beggar, whether it was a learned Pandit or an ignorant babe, to Gurudev all were equal, equally worthy of his veneration, of his love. He was one with all.

On the 15th January, 1956, Gurudev was discussing with the Ashram authorities the exorbitant charges that a printing press had made for printing a small book. It was the general feeling that the printers had cheated the Divine Life Society. Like a flash of lightning came Gurudev's remark: "Well, think that you yourself are enjoying the money through those who have cheated you and who are none but your own Self. This is the key to peace and happiness."

This is a supreme Vedantic formula for perennial peace and supreme bliss and can be multiplied. This is the direct road to cosmic consciousness and Self-realisation. But it takes a lot of hard inner work to feel that the man who has robbed you, who has cheated you, who has harmed you for his own enjoyment, is your own Self and that his pleasure or enjoyment is yours. With Gurudev this attitude was natural and hundreds of instances can be cited where he had readily applied this formula.

Fruit of Self-realisation

The most extraordinary feature of Gurudev's Self-realisation is that its fruits are enjoyed not only by him but by all mankind. His life, his service, his knowledge, his love, everything was for everybody, because all are equal sparks of the One Divine Flame, which alone Gurudev saw in all. Because his writings sprang from the infinite source of cosmic consciousness, they are ceaseless, highly inspiring, piercing the heart of the reader and tearing asunder the veil of ignorance.

Sri Gurudev radiated joy, bliss, peace and strength, and not only those who approached him and stood in his divine presence, but also those who were thousands of miles away and attuned themselves to him, received these vibrations and made their life sublime.

Not only is it true that Gurudev identified himself with all, but it is an extraordinary fact that everyone who approached Gurudev found his own image in the sage, only the latter was divine and free from the blemishes that adhered to the personality of the seeker. And it is true, Gurudev sympathised with everybody, was able to understand everybody and thus help and serve everybody as no one else could.

Who hadn't been wonderstruck by the motley crowd that surrounded Gurudev every day in the Office? People of completely different temperaments, of different nationalities, of

different aspirations and with various desires, all came seeking sympathy, solace and the solution to their problems at the lotus-feet of the sage. People used to be puzzled at the minute-to-minute changes that took place in Gurudev's personality, behaviour and attitude to the people around him. All in the same breath he cheered up the distressed, consoled the bereaved, comforted the afflicted, dictated his directions to the disciples, initiated a novice into the Mantra, demonstrated Pranayama to an aspirant, nodded his head and 'thanked' like an Englishman, folded his palms and greeted like an Indian, closed his eyes and contemplated like a supreme recluse, laughed and made others laugh with his educative humour. How did he do that? Though all these were varied expressions of the one Cosmic Love that flowed from his heart, yet they differed in accordance with the needs of the person to whom they were directed. Everyone got what he needed. The problems placed before him were often preposterous, but not so to him. Impossible things were asked of him, but he had nothing but love and sympathy for all, and he knew exactly how to deal with each case, for the simple reason that he at once became one with the person approaching him.

He was ever rooted in Universal Consciousness. Gurudev never disturbed the beliefs of anyone, and he took each aspirant from where he stood and gently led him by the hand to the goal of life. He never converted, but he led.

CHAPTER SIX

THE YOGA OF SYNTHESIS

1. *Gurudev's daily routine includes a little of the elements of all the Yogas. He asks us to do as he does.*
2. *Gurudev's Trisul - the Spiritual Diary, Resolves Form and Daily Routine - helps the aspirant practice this Yoga of Synthesis.*
3. *Sivananda Yoga is the Yoga of the Coming Age..*

There have been in the history of the world prophets, sages and saints, who have practised and preached one or the other modes of approaching that Goal which is Self-realisation. It is Gurudev, the Prophet of the Yoga of Synthesis, who has insisted that it is not enough if one performed any one kind of spiritual practice, however well he might strive to do so, but that every aspirant should incorporate in his spiritual programme all the items of all the Yogas or modes of approaching God.

Gurudev had no doctrine of his own. He redelivered the divine message that has time and again been given to us by God. He spoke for God, for he was one with God. Yet, if we can audaciously read a doctrine into his teaching, it is

'The doctrine of a Little'. It is otherwise known as the Yoga of Synthesis. Gurudev warned us that only the harmonious development of the entire being could take us easily to the goal. A weak spot anywhere in the structure would ruin the whole. Moreover, specialisation in any one branch of spiritual practice would rob one of the spirit of understanding and tolerance, would breed contempt and hatred and ultimately fatten one's egoism. Gurudev's 'Doctrine of a Little' completely avoids all the pitfalls on the Path and leads the aspirant along the smooth, easy, pleasant road to the Lord's feet. Here is the Doctrine, in Gurudev's own words. He has put it in the form of a small song which can be sung in the Mahamantra tune. Gurudev himself sang this 'Song of a Little' at every meeting he addressed during his All India-Ceylon Tour in 1950:

*Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna*

Krishna Hare Hare

Eat a little, drink a little,
Talk a little, sleep a little,
Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, give a little,
Work a little, rest a little,
Study a little, worship a little.
Do Asana a little, Pranayama a little,
Reflect a little, meditate a little.

Do Japa a little, do Kirtan a little,
Write Mantra a little, have Satsang a little.

Do a little of each; you will have time for all.
God-realisation is thus brought within your easy reach and you are saved from the fear of a fall.

This synthesis was expressed in each of Gurudev's actions. His own daily routine was a mixture of everything that he asked us to do. His daily life was the 'Song of a Little.' And what is most remarkable, the very paraphernalia that he carried with him wherever he went, demonstrated this song of a little.

From the early days of his life at Rishikesh, Gurudev always carried with him a number of bags, which contained a little of everything: biscuits and cashew nuts, sweets for children, some common medicines for ordinary ailments, leaflets and books for distribution to aspirants, etc., etc. Gurudev once remarked: "Everybody should have a bag which contains a miniature world!" and then narrated an incident that happened during the Swarg Ashram days. While he was on tour at Lucknow along with the Singhai Maharani an accident happened and their car was stranded at a lonely place at night. Just then the driver was hunting for a box of matches and a candle. Quickly, Gurudev produced these out of his bag! And his bag contained some biscuits for children, a needle, sticking plaster, tincture of Iodine, Aspirin, Saridon, paper, pencil, a pair of

scissors, a Gita, a rosary, a Mantra note book, etc. Walking along the road itself, one can do a little charity, do a little service of the sick, do a little Japa, study Gita a little, when you have a little leisure at the bus-stop or write Mantra a little, and so on.

Gurudev's Spiritual Diary, one of the most remarkable documents, is your Guru-at-home, which helps you in the practice of this Yoga of Synthesis. In the Diary Gurudev has included all the items of spiritual practice and asked you to record your daily practice, not in order to gloat over the number of Malas of Japa or Pranayama you have done, but to prevent a waning of enthusiasm. This Diary, and its counterparts, the Daily Routine and the Annual Resolves Form constitute Gurudev's Trisul before which the demon of worldliness and of ignorance flees.

CONCLUSION

This Yoga of Synthesis is Gurudev's greatest gift to humanity, his greatest contribution to world peace, to commonweal and to the cause of the cultivation of human brotherhood. This Yoga is broad based and represents the cream of the teachings of all religions, of all scriptures, of all countries. It is the universal common ground.

The practice of this Yoga of Synthesis ennobles man, broadens his outlook, softens his heart, enlightens his intellect and awakens his

soul consciousness. In the light of this Yoga man lives, loves and serves all. He strives to perfect himself, to remove his inner weaknesses and to cultivate virtuous qualities. Irrespective of the religion he professes, the creed he follows and the country he belongs to, Gurudev's disciple becomes a better man and strives to realise universal brotherhood and universal Atmahood in his daily life. This is the ideal Gurudev placed before his disciples. Striving to reach this ideal, man can become a superman. In reaching it, he realises God.

Gurudev's Yoga is the Yoga of the Coming Age

May Sri Guru Bhagawan, Lord Sivananda, Yogeshwara, the Supreme Refuge of all protect us and serve as our sole prop in the dark and dreary desert of Samsara. May he, the Incarnation of the Almighty, forever guide humanity by his invisible Hand

from falsehood to Truth,
from darkness to Light,
from mortality to Immortality.

Sri Satguru Maharaj ki Jai!



About This Book:

In these pages Swami Venkatesananda lets us experience Gurudev Swami Sivananda who preached the Yoga of Synthesis to the world and was himself the personification of the Yoga of Synthesis.

Even in old age Swami Sivananda daily practised Hatha Yoga and Pranayama and benefited greatly thereof. He could never refrain from Karma Yoga – even as a boy he had to serve – he lived to serve. His limitless love for God and His creation made him a total Bhakta. He was a perfect Raja Yogi; all the Angas according to Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga were born with Gurudev. Jnana was his very nature; and so his actions, his words, his movements had their source in cosmic consciousness.

Swami Venkatesananda was one of Swami Sivananda's closest disciples, and his love for his Guru was unique.



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